18 July 2021 Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church
Pentecost 8 Vienna, VA

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"Our Good and Gracious Shepherd"
Text: Mark 6:30-44; Jeremiah 23:1-6

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Israel was again at the border of the Promised Land. They could see it. They could almost touch it. They would, soon. The last time they were here, 40 years before this, they didn't. They didn't trust the Lord, didn't believe Him. That this gift, this land, He could actually give. So they didn't receive the gift. Back to the desert, they had to turn.

But now they were back. Moses preaches to them about all that the Lord has said, all that the Lord has done, all that the Lord has promised, that they not make the same mistake again. That this time, they receive this gift from God.

But Moses had another concern as well. For he was about to die. *He* would not enter the Promised Land. But he was not concerned for Himself, but for the people. That they be led faithfully. And so he asked the Lord to *appoint a man over the congregation who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the Lord may not be* **as sheep that have no shepherd** (Numbers 27:17).

The Lord did so, appointing Joshua. And Joshua led them in.

But Jeremiah's day, however, as we heard, God's people had become as Moses had feared. After Joshua, Israel's leaders were a mixed bag. The faith of the people came and went, waxed and waned. Some were faithful shepherds, but many were not. They were shepherds who didn't shepherd. They didn't tend the flock, they scattered it. They didn't feed the flock, they destroyed it. They didn't lead the flock, they misled the people.

So when Jesus came, God's people were hungry. That's why they ran around the Sea of Galilee to get to where Jesus was. That's why they sat there all day, listening to Jesus teach. They were hungry for the Word of God. They had been fed on other food, other teaching. Food that did not nourish. Do this, do that. Be this, be that. And it never satisfied. It always fell short. They always fell short.

But Jesus was different. As we've heard, He didn't teach as their teachers did, He taught with authority. But even more than that, He taught with compassion. Not driving them,

but caring for them. Not demanding from them, but binding them up. When they listened to Jesus, they never left hungry. They left like they had been to a lavish banquet. Their souls filled with good food. They left with the work of God and the promises of God ringing in their ears. Including the promise God made through the prophet Jeremiah, that one day ***He would raise up a righteous shepherd***, a good shepherd, for His people.

So it was this day beside the Sea of Galilee.

But when it grew late in the day, another need arose. People who are both body and soul need feeding of both body and soul. Maybe the children there were getting restless or starting to cry. Or maybe the disciples themselves were getting hungry. After all, Mark tells us, they went to where they were because they had ***had no leisure even to eat***. So now Jesus had done His part. He has taught the people. Now send the people away to do *their* part - to get some food for themselves, the disciples said. They had gathered around Jesus . . . or had He gathered them? Was it now the disciples scattering them again?

So no. Jesus has a better idea. *Why don't you do it?* Jesus says. ***<u>You</u> give them something to eat.***

Now, the disciples had just come back from Jesus sending them out two by two into the towns and villages. They had taken nothing but had lacked nothing. And Jesus had given them authority. They preached. They cast out demons. They healed many who were sick. But this? Feed a crowd like this? That they could not possibly do. Five loaves of bread and two fish would make a lot of sandwiches, but not this many. What answer did Jesus expect from them?

Jesus tells the people to sit down. That's interesting. *Why were they standing?* Had the disciples already been telling them to go? No, that won't do. Not for a good shepherd. Sit, Jesus says. Sit, my children, Sit, my sheep. I will shepherd you. I am your Good Shepherd. Things are not now like they were before. There is something new. Some<u>ONE</u> new. They called Him the Son of David, and so He was. And so He would be. The promised shepherd who will care for them, so that they fear no more, nor be dismayed, nor shall any be missing.

The one promised to Adam and Eve, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to David and Solomon, to Jeremiah and the prophets, was now here. He would make them recline in green pastures and restore them. And for the one who created all that is out of nothing, including the wheat and the fish, and the rain and the water that gives them life, five loaves of bread and two fish is a bounty. Is more than enough.

And did you ever wonder who was in that congregation that day? Who were those people there in that crowd, listening to Jesus and then being fed by Him? Probably the old and the young. Big families and little families. Fishermen and businessmen. Jews and

Gentiles. Loyalists and Zealots. Tax collectors and sinners. It doesn't matter to Jesus. It is His flock. They are all one. **They came here for Him. He came here for them.**

And for us.

Five thousand is a lot of people. If it were five thousand men *with their families*, how many more even than that. Imagine that many here, in our church. But even so, then or now, five thousand or more, not everyone was there. Many did not run around the lake. Many who were on that side of the lake didn't care. Many thought Jesus a bad shepherd, not a good one. So they didn't go. So they didn't receive.

That's not what Jesus wants. He wants all to receive His gifts. And they do, actually. For everything that is, is a gift from God. The rain that falls on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45). Divine blessings are given to believers and unbelievers. The Lord is good and generous to all. We pray the Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer, for our daily bread, not *so* that God will give it - He already does - but so that we will realize it all as gift from Him and receive our daily bread with thanksgiving. *The eyes of all look to You, O Lord, and You give them their food at the proper time; You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing* (Psalm 145:15-16).

Sin, of course, effects these gifts of God. Creation is not as it once was. Greedy men horde while others go hungry. One life is destroyed so that another may prosper. Competition not compassion, lust not love, pride not humility, power not service, me not you, take these gifts of God for all and tries to make them mine. That if there are only five loaves of bread and two fish, then I make sure I'm close enough to the front of the line to get *my* sandwich . . . or, make sure *my* gas tank is topped off . . . or, make sure *I* have enough toilet paper to last for a while . . .

So when Jesus told His disciples to give this flock something to eat, He knew they couldn't do it. But rather than send them away, He wanted His disciples to turn to Him, the Giver of gifts, to give what was needed. Today we call that repentance. To repent of ourselves, turn away from ourselves and relying on ourselves, and look to Him. *The eyes of all look to You, O Lord* . . . Or, at least, we should.

Because in this world so filled with problems and division and only getting worse, what can we do with our five fingers and two feet? We do what we can, but what is so little among so much?

And do we forget the one who can? Whose five fingers and two feet would save far more than five thousand, but every single person who ever lived and ever will live? For those same hands that took that bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it, would soon be nailed to a cross. *Not* to never again take, bless, thank, break, and give, *but that risen from the dead, He do so forever*. He do so today. Here. That that miracle of feeding the flock

continue here as the divine and human, dead and now risen, Good Shepherd gives His Body to eat and His Blood to drink. And That His voice still sound forth in the faithful preaching of His Word. And that children of God still be brought into His fold and flock through the washing of Baptism. And that just the eyes of our bodies look to Him for the food we need, so the eyes of our souls look to Him for the forgiveness we need. That all these gifts of His be our daily bread, and that He lead us to realize this and receive these gifts with thanksgiving.

These gifts that are here for all, just as no one in that crowd by the Sea of Galilee that day left hungry. There was even plenty left over. The Lord is never stingy with His gifts, but lavish.

But remember, there *were* people who did remain hungry - those who did not bother, who could not be bothered, to go and be with Jesus. Jesus was there for them, Jesus' feeding was there for them, but they would not.

But that is not the end of the story, of course. Just as Jesus gave His disciples then the food to give to the flock, so He gives His Church these gifts to give and sends His Church to give these gifts. To all. But today, too, not all will come, not all will receive, not all will be bothered, though we pray they will. So each week we gather by the Sea of the Font, we receive the gift of His Absolution, we hear our Shepherd teach, and we eat His divine food. And we know: how blessed we are to be in this flock, the flock of the Good Shepherd.

And thus blessed, we bless. *Let us bless the Lord! Thanks be to God*, we say. And we take this blessing out into the world, to others. Twelve baskets full left over. But what are these, what are we, among so many? More than enough. More than enough in the hands of Jesus. Merciful hands. Mighty hands. Compassionate hands. Blessing hands. Feeding hands. Tending hands. Gracious hands. Until they be raising hands, raising us on the Last Day, to enter *our* Promised Land. Sheep with our Shepherd. Gifts not deserved, but freely given. So *let us bless the Lord!* [Thanks be to God!]

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.