

Laetare  
St. John 6:1-15  
March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2020  
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC  
Simpsonville, SC  
Pastor Jerald Dulas

## A Great Multitude Coming Toward Him

*In Nomine Iesu!*

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

### **Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:**

Lord God, heavenly Father, Who by Thy Son didst feed five thousand men in the desert with five loaves and two fishes: We beseech Thee to abide graciously also with us in the fullness of Thy blessing. Preserve us from avarice and the cares of this life, that we may seek first Thy kingdom and Thy righteousness, and in all things perceive Thy fatherly goodness, through Jesus Christ, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one true God world without end. Amen.

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

This Gospel reading from the Evangelist and Apostle St. John seems to be out of sorts with the rest of the season of Lent. All the other Gospels have to do in some way with our Lord + Jesus confronting the devil or a demon, or being accused of being league with Satan by the scribes and Pharisees, but not this Gospel. Part of the reason is that we have reached the halfway point of Lent. The halfway points of the seasons of Advent, Lent and Easter are all marked with a “rejoicing” Sunday. *Gaudete* in Advent, *Jubilate* in the Easter season, and here today we have *Laetare*. All three of those Latin titles have the meaning of “rejoice.” We see this in the Antiphon for the Introit, which is where these titles come from; they come from the first word(s) of the Introit Antiphon. In the Introit we sang, “Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad with her, all you who love her; rejoice for joy with her, all you who mourn for her.”

With this Sunday we take a break—an interlude—from the rigors of Lent and our focus on our sin and our breaking of the Ten Commandments, just before we enter into Passiontide next Sunday on Judica Sunday, where our focus will turn to the cross of our Lord + Jesus Christ, and His Passion—His suffering and death—on our behalf. This Sunday of rejoicing is part of the reason why this Sunday seems out of sorts with the rest of Lent.

The other reason is that as the Church turns her focus from its breaking of the Ten Commandments, and our sinfulness, and the punishment we rightly deserve on account of it, the Church is pulled out of its sorrow over sin—its contrition—to see how gracious and compassionate our Lord + Jesus is toward His people. We are shown what rewards are ours on account of our faith. We are shown just how generously our Lord + Jesus desires to be with those who trust in Him for all things necessary in this life.

In the feeding of the five thousand our Lord + Jesus begins this miracle with a question to His Apostles. He sees a great multitude coming toward Him. This great multitude is there for only one reason: to hear the preaching of the Lord + Jesus. They desire to hear His Word. Is this not the response that we should all have? Is this not the reason that we should be hear in this holy sanctuary to hear the Word of God and receive from Him the promise of salvation and forgiveness found in His Word?

Therefore, having seen the great multitude coming toward Him to hear His Word; the great crowd coming to Him desiring only to live upon the bread of the Word of God given from the lips of the Living Bread Himself, our Lord + Jesus asks Philip where are they to get bread for all these people.

We know from the rest of the narrative that this was not a logistical question. He was not asking Philip how and with what means he would be able to buy bread for all these people. Even though the Apostles interpret the question this way. It would take more the two hundred denarii to buy bread for this great multitude. The only thing they had was five barley loaves and two small fish. That clearly would not be enough in the minds of the disciples. But our Lord + Jesus is not asking a logistical question. He is asking the Apostles in order to teach them something about faith.

The Lord + Jesus wants His Apostles to understand that when we place our entire faith and trust in Him there is nothing that we will be lacking, nor will there be anything that we will desire or want, for He will supply them all to us according to His good will and pleasure.

And here is where the connection between the Introit Psalm and the Gospel reading is revealed. For why are we to rejoice according to the Introit? Because the Psalmist's feet are standing in Jerusalem and he is about ready to go into the house of the Lord. This is why the Psalmist is able to rejoice in the midst of mourning, for he is about to hear the Word of God and receive His good gifts. This is where faith and trust in the Lord + Jesus drives all believers; it drives us into His Word; it drives us to come to this holy house—into the house of the Lord; it drives us to stand in the Church—in Jerusalem—and look upon our Lord's grace and compassion for us.

Our Lord + Jesus desires to give us all so many good things and not just bread and fish, that is, earthly things meant to sustain our physical bodies. Our Lord + Jesus desires to win forgiveness of sins for us by His perfect obedience to the Law and will of God, and to suffer our punishment on the tree of the holy cross. He came down from Heaven and took upon Himself our flesh so that He might accomplish this for us; so that He might atone for the sins of the whole world. We who cling to Him in faith receive fully the gifts that He desires to give: forgiveness, life and salvation.

Faith is revealed through tribulation and trial. The great multitude only came to our Lord + Jesus, only followed Him, to hear His holy Word—His preaching. They did not come thinking about what earthly needs they would have. They must have been without food, for why else would our Lord + Jesus inquire of His Apostles if this were not the case. But in their hunger, they do not leave the Lord to go find food, but instead stay with Him to hear His Word. In their trial—their lack of food and hunger—they refused to leave the Lord.

In our society today, this does not seem to be the case. How many people are panicking these days, so afraid of being without food that they have emptied the shelves of all food, to the detriment of their fellowman. This truly shows their hearts; how full of evil and corruption it truly is. They reveal that they care nothing for their fellowman. And as bad as that is, they reveal even more how truly faithless they are. Is not our Lord God gracious and compassionate? Does not our Lord + Jesus desire to supply all of the needs of both our body and soul?

Our society in its narcissism and self-centeredness has completely forgotten about Who is in charge of all things in this world; they refuse to acknowledge our Lord God's providence and care for all His creation. On this Sunday of Laetare—this Sunday of rejoicing that brings us to the close of our focus on the Ten Commandments and our breaking of them—we are reminded of the Commandment that we break the most, our total lack of fear, love and trust in the Lord God. We place our trust in so many other things that our Lord God. Whatever thing people cling to in times of trial and tribulation that is their god. Trial and tribulation reveal faith, or our lack thereof. Our society has gone so bat soup crazy that they have forgotten Who is in charge of all things; they have forgotten that we have a loving and

compassionate and gracious Lord God Who desires to give us all good things, both for our body and our soul.

The great multitude in the Gospel from the Evangelist and Apostle St. John came towards our Lord + Jesus to hear His holy Word and receive the benefits that His preaching gives. We too have placed our feet in Jerusalem, and have gone up into the house of the Lord, so that we might receive from Him the strengthening of our faith. Our faith is strengthened when we hear the promises of our Lord + Jesus. He fed the five thousand men, plus women and children, and they perceived that He was truly the Prophet come into the world. His Word was accompanied with a physical sign that He does care for His people.

We have come to hear His holy Word, and He also deigns to feed us with bread and give us drink with wine. In this bread and wine, He gives us His very self. He gives us His true and substantial Body and Blood in this bread and wine. This Blessed Sacrament gives to all who believe that they truly receive forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation, exactly what they believe it gives. Let us therefore rejoice that our Lord + Jesus has granted us faith to attend upon His holy Word through the preaching of the Gospel from the pulpit. Let us rejoice that He has caused our feet to stand in this holy house—the house of the Lord God—and receive His holy gifts. He desires to give us abundantly of His good treasures, and He desires to feed us richly with all that we need to support this body and life.

Moreover, our Lord + Jesus has seen our weakness, that we struggle in times of trial and tribulation to cling to Him in perfect faith. Therefore, He knowing our weakness has come down from Heaven, to redeem us through His perfect obedience and through His suffering and death. He comes to give us faith through the Holy Ghost working through the means of grace so that we might cling to Him and His promises and learn to trust Him in all times of hardship and pain. Even more, He teaches us to trust in Him when we are racked with guilt over our sins and in our shame. For He knows how often we fail to keep His Commandments. Therefore, He has come to us so that we might find forgiveness in Him and in Him alone.

Our Lord + Jesus in His compassion fed the five thousand men, plus women and children, in the wilderness to show that He cares for our every physical need. On the cross He showed His compassion for us as He showed that He cares for our every spiritual need. In this Blessed Sacrament of the Altar our Lord + Jesus feeds us with His Body and Blood under the bread and wine, to show that He cares for our eternal welfare; forgiving us of our sins, and granted us eternal life and salvation. My dear friends, cling in faith to Him and His good gifts, for He desires to have so much compassion on you, that you can do no other thing than to rejoice in Him and in Him alone. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:**

Lord God, heavenly Father, Who through Thy Son in the desert with little didst abundantly feed thousands, we beseech Thee, visit us also with Thy blessing, and preserve us from covetousness and cares of the body, that we may seek first Thy kingdom and righteousness, and experience Thy fatherly goodness in all things needful for soul and body; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

**The Votum:**

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

*Soli Deo Gloria!*