

Laetare
St. John 6:1-15
March 27th, 2022
Sts. Peter and Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
St. Michael and All Angels Evangelical Lutheran Mission, UAC
Martinez, GA
Pastor Jerald Dulas

This Is Truly the Prophet

In Nomine Iesu!

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

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

Almighty and Everlasting God, Who hast given Thine Only-Begotten Son into suffering and death, that in our stead He might render satisfaction to the Law, we most heartily beseech Thee, graciously keep us henceforth from seeking our own righteousness by the works of the Law, and enable us in true faith to put our trust solely in the merit of Jesus Christ, that so by Thy Holy Spirit the righteousness of the Law may be fulfilled in us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One 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.

My dear friends, today is Laetare Sunday. It is a Sunday of rejoicing. That is what Laetare means, it means “rejoicing.” For what reason do we rejoice? What reason do we have to rejoice in the middle of the penitential Lenten season? What reason do we have to rejoice when we are filled with sin, and sin much every day? We do not do the things which we ought to do, and we fail to do not do the things we should not do. And besides our sinful actions, we are trapped in the bondage of the sin we inherited from our first parents, Adam and Eve. We are in bondage to the original sin. We cannot shake off from ourselves our sin and sinfulness. Therefore, my dear friends, what reason do we have to rejoice?

We have spent the last few weeks, or at least we should have, focusing our attention upon the Ten Commandments; we have focused on our inability to keep them. We have looked inside of ourselves and found nothing worthy of praise. We have looked inside ourselves and found only sin and corruption, from which we cannot free ourselves. This is, of course, something we should be doing always, throughout the year, but especially during the penitential seasons of Advent and Lent. And I would say especially during this first part of Lent. When we examine ourselves and find in us nothing but sin and death, we can in no wise say that we can save ourselves.

This is why this Sunday—Laetare Sunday—serves as a day of rejoicing. This Sunday is a transitional day. We transition from one place to another. We transition from looking inside ourselves at our sin, to outside ourselves to our only and true source of salvation: the passion of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Next Sunday through Easter, we will turn our attention to our only source of salvation, the suffering and death of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. Today is a day of rejoicing, because we get to see that salvation is not inside ourselves; it is not because of our keeping of the Law, nor are we condemned because of our inability to keep the Law. We are saved because of what our Lord + Jesus does for us poor, miserable sinners.

This transition from looking inside ourselves to our external salvation in our Lord + Jesus is given to us by a Gospel from the Apostle and Evangelist St. John, that seems out of place with the Gospels we have had, and will have until Easter. We are given the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand men, plus women and children. We are taken from looking inside at ourselves, examining how we can in no wise set ourselves free by our own keeping of the Law, to the cross of our Lord + Jesus; how He has taken upon Himself our nature that so He might fulfill the whole Law and will of God, and for us and for our deliverance suffer death and all that we deserve on account of our sins. We transition, we find refreshment from our worries over our sins, through our Lord showing us that He provides the means of our salvation, and He provides the means for our sustenance in this flesh and life of sin and death.

We are saved from our sins, because our Lord gives to us His abundant gifts; His gifts of mercy and compassion for us poor, miserable sinners. This feeding of the five thousand is a foreshadowing of the meal that He gives to all those who have been baptized and cling to Him in faith. This is the meal that sustains us in our earthly life, as we are hounded on all sides from the devil and the world, and are hounded by our guilty consciences from within by our sinful flesh. The Lord + Jesus provided bread and fish to all those who came to hear His Word; who came to hear His preaching. He preached repentance toward the forgiveness of sins. We preach Christ crucified. We preach that there is forgiveness in the crucified Christ for all those who repent of their sins—who no longer trust in their ability to keep the Law—and in faith cling to His works and merits on their behalf.

The meal that our Lord provided for the five thousand on the mountain near the Sea of Galilee satisfied their earthly hunger. The meal that our Lord + Jesus gives to us at this altar satisfies our spiritual hunger. It is our spiritual food which sustains us in the faith. Through this meal the Holy Ghost keeps and preserves us in the one, true faith, until we are called to our eternal home in Heaven. In this meal we find refreshment for our souls. For when we eat this meal, we confess that our salvation is not because of anything that we did, but solely because of our Lord's suffering and death—His passion—for us. In this meal we see that salvation is purely a gift give to us by our Lord + Jesus, just like the feeding of the five thousand to their full with only a handful of bread and fish was purely a gift.

This Gospel reading from St. John on this Laetare Sunday, this day of rejoicing, gives us refreshment, because it takes us away from our obsessing about our keeping, or not keeping, of the Law. It shows us that salvation is a gift; a gift of our Lord's compassion and mercy. He feeds the five thousand on account of His compassion for them. He feeds us His Body and Blood for the remission of our sins on account of His compassion for us.

Consider what St. Paul wrote to the churches of Galatia. He addresses those who trusted in their keeping of the Law. To them he says, "Have you actually read the Law?" The Law of God does only one thing for sinners: it condemns them. We have examined ourselves over the last few weeks according to the Law, and found that it condemns us, too. He who is born of the flesh—that is, all humanity—are condemned according to the Law. All those who are born of the Spirit, however, are saved. They are saved not because they did something. People dead in their sins and trespasses cannot do anything. Dead people cannot do anything.

We are saved because of what our Lord + Jesus did on our behalf. We are saved because we have been washed clean of all our sins by the waters of Holy Baptism. We are saved because we eat our Lord's Body and drink His Blood in bread and wine for the remission of our sins. The Holy Ghost creates and sustains faith in us through these means of grace. He creates faith in us because we hear of our Lord's compassion for us in the pure preaching of the Word. He creates faith in us because we hear from the pastor's lips that our sins have been forgiven by the Lord God on account of the Son of God's suffering and death on our behalf. He creates faith in us because we gather together as the Communion of Saints and comfort one another with our struggles and sins that we endure in this life.

This is why we should not ever forsake the gathering together for worship. Like the five thousand in today's Gospel who gathered together to hear our Lord + Jesus preach, we gather together in His Name to hear about His grace and mercy toward us. We are a Communion of Saints. We are a community. The Church is a community that gathers together to find comfort in one another. Christianity is not meant to be an individual effort. We need the community of the saints around us to help strengthen our faith; to assure us that the struggles we go through on account of sin, are not unique to us. We all struggle with our sin. We need to hear that from our fellow brothers and sisters often. When we share with one another our sorrows, we can also share each other's joys. We can rejoice together, as we do on this day of rejoicing.

For, my dear friends, today we find refreshment from looking inside ourselves and seeing only sin and death, to our Lord's cross and passion on our behalf. He has suffered and died for us all. He saves all those who cling in faith to His work of salvation by mercifully forgiving their sins. He even provides a meal for us that helps us to confidently believe this, and strengthen our faith in His gifts. He has instituted for us His Holy Supper, in which we receive His true and substantial Body and Blood in bread and wine for the remission of all our sins. We also do this as a community of saints. For we gather together and share this meal with the whole Christian Church on Earth. We are not just communing by ourselves, but we are joining with far more than five thousand men, plus women and children. We are communing with angels and archangels, and all the company of Heaven. We are communing with all those on Earth who cling in faith to the Lord + Jesus. Gathered at this altar when we come are myriads upon myriads gathered together with us.

Even though the Church is made up of many grains, we are all one loaf. Even though the Church is made up of many grapes, we are all one Cup. For we all eat the same Body and drink the same Blood of the same Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Therefore, rejoice with the Church and be glad with her for salvation is found within her walls. Rejoice all that love the Church for within her walls the suffering and death of our Lord + Jesus on our behalf is preached in its truth and purity. Rejoice for joy all who mourn over their sins, for in the Church forgiveness of sins is given freely and abundantly. Rejoice, my dear friends, for salvation is not found inside us—it is not found in our works and keeping of the Law—but it is found in our Lord's sacrifice on our behalf. Let us rejoice when it is time to gather for worship and go into the house of the Lord, for within her palace walls is our salvation found. 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!