

Coming, Inviting
Matthew 14:19-20

And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.

The hands of Jesus are hands that invite and hands that heal. They also are hands that provide. The feeding of the 5,000 clearly demonstrates this divine truth of God who created all things and provides for them.

When God showed Adam and Eve their home on earth, they saw a magnificent garden with more than enough to feed them and to keep them. It was a place of beauty, but it was also evidence of God's readiness to provide for his creation. It was not just a flower garden – something pretty to see and pleasant to walk in. It was a productive garden, providing the energy and the nutrients needed for human health and thriving.

As for us, Luther observes in his small catechism, "I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that he has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them." The hands of the Savior are the hands of God, who bound himself to provide for all he had made.

We also understand, that when the seed company produces the seed for the farmers, the people who do that are doing it as God's servants, and that it is God who is providing the seed. As the farm family works hard to plant, cultivate, weed, and harvest, they are doing it as God's agents. God is providing for his creatures through the farm. And as the food is transported, and packaged, and inspected, and distributed, and retailed, and moves through the check-out lanes, it is God who is behind all that, and he does it all for our benefit. The food we enjoy is not manna on the ground, but it is just as certainly God's gift to us, as he uses people in many different vocations to provide for us and, in the process, keep his promises to us.

As we prepare meals for our families, we are serving in a vocation, a calling, in which we are God's agents. God is using us to provide for the people in our care. While we can grow weary of the planning, the cooking, and the cleaning up, we are

part of God's program of providing for his creatures.

Jesus and the disciples got into a boat and crossed the Sea of Galilee to a deserted place to be alone. But when the people heard that Jesus had departed they followed on foot. When Jesus saw that the crowds had followed them, how did He react? Did He get back into the boat and go further away? Did He get upset that He wouldn't get any rest or time alone with the disciples?

Far from being irritated by this intrusion, He had compassion for them and began to heal many with diseases. Now when evening came, the disciples knew the crowds would soon grow hungry. Their own stomachs were probably starting to growl. So they came to Jesus and said, "Send these people away, Lord. It is getting late and time for dinner and we have no way to feed them, so send them on their way now. Let them go to the villages and fend for themselves!"

The disciples still didn't get it, Jesus assured them there was no need to send the crowd away. Why should the people leave when the One who opens His hand and supplies the desire of every living thing is present? Jesus really catches the disciples off guard by saying, "YOU give them something to eat." Can you imagine the look on the disciple's faces? They must have been floored! "Give them something to eat? We have nothing but five loaves and two fish." They had forgotten, just like we do, they also had the Christ, Jesus the Son of God.

Patently Jesus says, "Bring them here to me." He invites them. There were more than five thousand people present. Matthew tells us it was five thousand men plus women and children. For all we know if each man had a wife, there could have been more like 10,000, 15,000 or 20,000 or more people present.

Jesus takes the five loaves and two fish, stands looking to the heavens, probably with His arms raised, gives thanks for what is in front of him, and breaks the loaves and gives it to the disciples and tells them to feed my people.

That is exactly what they did and there was plenty for all. No, they didn't have their choice at the Golden Corral, or a Quarter Pounder with cheese, fries and a shake but they were all satisfied. When they were full the disciples gathered what was left and there were twelve baskets full. There

was more left over when Jesus finished than when He began. Ironically enough there was a basket for each unbelieving disciple.

The miracle is a spiritual lesson for disciples of every generation. The hungry multitude is always present. There is always a little band of disciples with seemingly pitiful resources. And always there is the compassionate Savior. When disciples are willing to give Him their little, He multiplies it to feed thousands. The notable difference is that the thousands who were fed by Galilee had their hunger satisfied only for a short time; those today that feed upon the living Christ are satisfied forever.

The disciples of Jesus suggested that the people should pay the price for the lack of preparation. They suggested that they be sent away hungry. But not Jesus. He provided for them. The people in God's creation often bite the hand that feeds them, but God still cares for them. He comes to meet their needs. He invites them to be nourished physically and spiritually.

More importantly, God designed a plan of salvation. He covers our sins and failures, just as he fed the multitude who should have brought provisions with them. A boy had a few fish and some bread. Jesus took them, gave thanks, blessed them, and made a great feast.

The Lord of creation is also our Provider. From his hands we have more than just bread for the body. We have the bread of life. The same hands that made a banquet carried a cross. Those hands were spiked to the cross, where he gave his life for you.

Whenever we eat this bread and drink this wine, we remember his death until he comes. We do it often, because we need to be reminded often that we are only temporary, short-term residents of this world. Our citizenship is in heaven. It is promised and sealed to us. We will live there for eternity. The Lord's Supper is God's feast of love and forgiveness, needed only until Christ the Lord comes again, and takes us to our permanent residence.

Because of what he provides for us, Jesus is in our heart and our mind and our understanding. Our body becomes his temple. We dwell in him because he dwells in us. It makes us different. It makes us grateful people to live lives of compassion and sharing. It frees us from the need to pile things up, because we know our God cares for us and loves us with an everlasting love.

In the difficult battles in our lives, we will never go hungry, because we have a Redeemer who nourishes us and cares for us.

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