

The Seventh Sunday After Pentecost • July 31, 2011

St. John's Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA

Rev. Braun Campbell

Isaiah 55:1-5; Matthew 14:13-21

“Fed”

You've probably got dozens, if not hundreds, of options for getting yourself fed. Finding food is a pretty easy thing for most of the people in our area, with supermarkets and specialty stores supplying ingredients for almost any kind of meal – even something as simple as fresh bread and fish. But you don't just feed on what you eat and drink. Think about that for a moment. Consider the ways in which you regularly engage the world around you to get what you think you need. If you're looking for information, there's a feast of it readily available for your consumption – beyond newspapers and broadcast networks, you can connect to a newsfeed that has been tailored to your particular interests, keeping you informed with events as soon as they're reported. If you're craving some entertainment, just open a book, turn on the television, go to a museum, or play a game on a handheld device. You might feel the need for companionship that friends and loved ones offer, so you go spend time with them. There's always the possibility that there's some *thing* out there that you need – whatever it might be – that once you have it, life will be pretty good (or, at least, better). Because you have a need, you feed.

You need to feed because of that void that you can never quite fill. Even once you've gone and fed, obtained what you thought you needed, you'll need to feed again. You can have a big breakfast one day and still find your stomach grumbling later. You can check your e-mail or your text messages now, but you'll just be glancing at your screen before long to see if something new has come in. Even the best novel or the most exciting cruise can keep you satisfied for only so long before you want to try another. The void remains. **You are deficient.**

You are deficient because **you need to feed on something outside yourself to live – to truly live.** That deficiency can become obvious when you know you don't have enough money to buy something to eat or to pay all the bills. But sometimes you don't realize it until after you've fed and fed on pleasure or competition or achievement, only to find that the void is still there in your life. It seems like nothing short of a miracle can eliminate the void and leave you fed.

Miracles: extraordinary events, specifically those events that can only come about through divine action. Over the next few weeks, we'll look at the miracles that Jesus performs in our Gospel readings from Matthew. Today, you've heard how Jesus fed over five thousand men, along with all the women and children who were gathered there, anticipating where he'd been going. But even before that, Jesus performed other miracles. Did you catch that? He healed the sick among them. Matthew even tells us why Jesus did this, revealing our Lord's attitude toward this vast crowd of people. Even though Jesus had gone to spend some time alone following the death of John the Baptizer, his relative, Jesus didn't ignore them; instead, he had compassion on them.

This is an amazing thing about God: **He has compassion on people who don't deserve it.** He gives them what they need to live – truly live. There in that deserted place, that desert, Jesus fed the people with more than they could ever have expected, even more than his own disciples thought possible. As both the healing and the feeding of the crowd show us, he cares about their physical needs as well as the spiritual ones. We see the compassionate power of Jesus to people who are deficient.

In our first reading, from Isaiah 55, we hear God calling people to eat and drink, to enjoy His compassion, even though they have no way of paying for it. God is calling you to know His compassion today. Instead of working so hard to fill the void that's in your life – the void that each of us has because of our sin – God wants you to recline at His table and enjoy the satisfaction of having what you need to truly live. I came across a quote that pretty clearly communicates what

we're hearing through the prophet here: "Whereas the gods of this world require a high price for what is ultimately dust and ashes, the Lord offers for free a relationship that will never end and that has universal implications." [John Oswalt's NICOT commentary on the book of Isaiah, p. 434] As He did while leading the people of Israel to the Promised Land, God again feeds His people in the wilderness on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. And He does so again for us today.

In our hymns in worship today, you'll sing and hear about the "living bread from heaven." The same Jesus who fed the crowds will feed us today in the Lord's Supper. Like the people on the shore, like the disciples, we witness a miracle, a divine action breaking into our lives, when we gather for Communion. Here, he offers us not a symbol of his abiding presence but his real body and blood. Out of his compassion, he gives us himself – what we need to truly live. He has set the feast that we could never afford to attend. When God invites us to eat and drink without our having to pay, He does so because **He has already paid the costly price for a world of deficient people.** Jesus feeds the people who come to his table, giving life, *vitality*. It's the power that we need for living – the vitality that God gives isn't just a strengthening of spirit, but of body. Today, in this time, at this table, God is offering what you need to fill the void in your life, the void that Jesus alone can fill.

How have you been trying to get fed? Over the next seven days, consider all the ways in which you spend your time, your money, and your energy to fill that void in life, that deficiency which you know is there, as you go out and look to be fed. Start today. Really look at what you're consuming as you go through the day and ask yourself, "**Is this what I need to truly live?**" Keep asking yourself that question. When the answer's "No," look instead to what God is already giving to you to heal you and feed you. This might be a change from your usual routine, but set aside some time in the morning for a devotion and Bible reading. Our Lord will feed you as you enjoy something truly vital: one-on-one time spent with Him as His child. You'll find that the more you assess your consumption, how you're trying to get fed, the more you'll see how much easier and better it is just to let God feed you. He offers peace and satisfaction unattainable anywhere else.

You have a compassionate God, one Who heals and feeds. Our God, who works miracles to feed His people, now invites you: "**Come, and be fed.**"

Amen.