Beloved in the Lord: grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The gap between the world of the Bible and our world is huge. They wore tunics, we wear pants. They got everywhere on foot, we use our cars even to drive down the block. They lit their houses with lamps, we flip a switch.

But sometimes that gap is hidden from us. We think nothing of being hungry and having no food. Even if that happens to you in the middle of Montana you don’t really do anything different. You just keep driving down I-90—maybe a little faster. And even if the next offramp is 90 miles away, you know you’ll be wolfing down a Big Mac in about an hour.

It was not so in the Bible. Food was a scarce commodity. Daily bread meant daily bread—the bread the Lord gave today for today.

But now 4,000 men, plus their wives, plus their kids are out in the wilderness with Jesus. They can’t throttle it up just a little bit more to get to the next offramp a few minutes earlier. And it’s not like their hunger has only suddenly come upon them. They’ve been with the Lord Jesus for three full days now. All that’s left to their name is seven loaves of bread and a few small fish. They face real danger of death. And if not death, then real physical harm—from hunger, from dehydration, from exhaustion, out there in the wilderness of Palestine.

Behold: the cost of following Jesus.

You see, following Jesus isn’t a partially-in, partially-out proposition. He tells His disciples, “Whoever loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; anyone who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me” (Matthew 10.37). He told another would-be follower, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.” (Matthew 8.20) If you would follow Jesus, you can’t love your own house more than Him. And to yet another who would have seen to the funeral of his father first, Jesus said, “Follow Me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.” (Matthew 8:22) Every one of these times He’s saying, “I am your greatest good. There is no good higher than Me, no good apart from Me.”

Oh, but what a balancing act we love to make of following Jesus, as if Jesus Himself didn’t know better! We can commit to Jesus 25% of our Sundays, or 50, maybe even 75%!—but the rest? They’re for me. When it comes time to give back to the Giver of all things, we struggle to crack open our wallets, much less be generous about it, and least of all joyful. And we think that the far greater good for our kids—at least as long as the baseball season lasts—is being on the pitcher’s mound instead of at the feet of Jesus, receiving what He gives in His Word and Sacrament.

But isn’t that always the ruse of the Old Adam? God tells us one thing. He reveals it to us directly in His Word in plain English that just harbors no ambiguity—and, well, Old Adam, he’s got another word in response. He hems and haws; he hedges; he finds loopholes that don’t exist.
And that’s for the easy stuff. The stuff where you’re weighing up relative pleasure—will I have more fun watching Johnny play ball or sitting in church?

But in the Gospel for today it’s a whole ‘nother thing. The 4,000 men, plus their wives, plus their kids, have followed Jesus right down the road of the cross—right down the road of suffering. And they’ve done it because they’ve found in Jesus, and Jesus alone, their highest and only good. They’ve found in Him the sin-forgiver and eternal-life-giver. They’ve found in Him the one who supplies them with the righteousness they lack—a righteousness that He gives them and they don’t have to achieve. They’ve found in Him the one who rescues from death and devil and gives them heaven.

That’s funny, isn’t? Because they’ve found in Jesus the same things you’ve found in Jesus. The certainty of their death is no less than yours. Their experience of themselves as nothing but hell-bound sinners, when they really sat down to think about it, was no less than yours. Their desperation over where they’d spend eternity—that was no less than yours, either. And then Jesus walked into their world—destroying their death, trampling their hell, giving them heaven. And they left everything and followed Him.

Fellow-redeemed: the Lord Jesus has done no less for you. In fact, He’s done the same exact thing for you as He did for them. His death to forgive sins was for you no less than for them. His rising from the grave to open the doors to everlasting life was for you no less than for them. His constant grant of righteousness to them by His holy life was no less for those sinners than for you sinners. Their highest good. And yours.

And so they followed Jesus. Can you imagine how day 1 must have gone? They must have realized the food was running low. Day two was a little more desperate. But they stayed—because Jesus has the words of eternal life. And now it’s day three. 7 loaves of bread, and couple of crummy fishes. A crisis of faith.

What does faith do then?

It does what it always does. It clings to Jesus. It won’t have anything if it can’t have Jesus. It stares down death itself, if only it can have Jesus who destroys death. It risks health, if only it can have the Physician of the body and the soul. And it follows Him to the point of starving, who feeds the hunger and waters the thirst after the only righteousness that gives eternal life—His.

Fellow-redeemed: we’ve been led into our own crisis of faith. Over here, the voices telling you to avoid death by avoiding church; while here, the voice of Jesus who calls His own from their very graves. Over here, crippling fear of illness; while here, the Divine Physician of body and soul. Over here, every vain attempt to get the most out of this life; while here, Him who is the Resurrection and the Life, and who gives life in abundance.

What does faith do then?

It does what it always does. It clings to Jesus. It follows Him and finds Him wherever He is and promises to be—in His Word and Sacrament. And when it finds Him, it laughs to scorn hunger, thirst, illness, even death, because it has Jesus. It’s all in.

And casting all fear aside, it throws itself upon Jesus—for just as He had compassion on the crowd and gave them their daily bread, so does He have compassion on you. The Lord takes care of His own. He does give them their daily bread—and not just bread bread, but everything that’s needed to support this body and life. That’s what it means when He said, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be unto you.”
And here He proves it to you. Do you think that if you have such a Lord with such compassion that He won’t show it to you too?

Amen.

*pax domini, etc.*

jsb

sdg