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Lent 4 One Year Series 2017

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Lent IV (Laetare)

Today we hear the story of Jesus feeding the multitudes with five loaves and two fish. Of course this brings us to the whole issue of food and since this comes up so frequently among the metaphors which the Bible uses for the Gospel event, we need to explore eating a little bit. This is of course also a metaphor which translates very well. Most of us are not farmers anymore so all the agricultural metaphors of the Bible can be difficult sometimes. But all of us still eat, in fact, as our wealth has increased and our distance from the farms has increased, our attention to food has also increased, just notice all the food networks, magazines, etc.

Food is really interesting stuff. I suppose the scientists could create a grey tasteless mush which would have a perfect balance of all the necessary nutrients a body needs. I think we would starve to death. Food is indeed about feeding our bodies, but it is about so much more. Here is a partial list, can you think of any more ways that we use food?

1. Nutrition – food is necessary for us or we die, our bodies literally burn the calories we put into our mouths. Unfortunately our bodies also like to store up some reserves just in case we can't find the refrigerator tomorrow and most of us suffer from an excess of adipose tissues.
2. Community/Family – Food binds people together. Our most cherished family times are centered on meals. Perhaps your time is Thanksgiving which must involve dinner. But every reunion, every gathering of people just about involves food. If you are really a part of my family, you eat with us. One of the great problems our society faces today is that too many families don't eat together anymore and it is damaging the very fabric of our society.
3. Celebration – We celebrate with food, it is an essential part of joy. I challenge you to throw a party without food. It will flop. Birthdays need that cake. Christmas needs cookies and Thanksgiving is not the same without the big feast. Food is an integral part of the way we celebrate and express joy.
4. Comfort – We are all familiar with “comfort foods” most likely the things that you remember eating a lot of when you were a kid. This is not fancy stuff, just the macaroni and cheese, the meatloaf, the tuna casserole that sustained you when you were seven years old and burning calories in the neighborhood. Food can comfort us.
5. Expressions of Potent Emotion – We use food not only to express our joy, but a whole range of emotions. We give our beloved chocolate on Valentine's Day, we bring a casserole by when our neighbor's husband dies, we serve funeral luncheons, and our mothers push food on us when we come home because they love us. If you don't think this is so, try and give your sweetie a can of beans on Valentine's Day and see what happens.

6. Beauty – There is something weird about food and the aesthetic values we have. Food cannot just be nutritious, it has to look good, smell good, taste good, feel good, even sound right when we bite into it. I suppose the evolutionary types would say this is a defense against eating something spoiled which would hurt us, but that seems like an inadequate explanation of why I love that Thanksgiving dinner or the plate of food the guy at local Thai restaurant sets in front of me with the flowers and the beautiful sauce. Food is intricately tied into our estimation of what is beautiful. I don't think it is an accident that so many of the greatest artists were also passionate Christians.

In the verses which follow our reading today, Jesus repeatedly referred to himself as the “Bread of Life” the food that has come down from heaven. He gives and sustains life, but he also brings comfort, community, joy, love, and great beauty to our lives as well. Luther thought this passage stood at the heart of the message of Christ. Read his *Babylonian Captivity* in which he asserts that all this talk of Christ as the bread of life is not talking about the Lord's Supper; rather, the Lord's Supper is talking about this passage. What God does in the Eucharist is embody and explain what Jesus is saying in the rest of John 6. The story of the feeding of the multitudes which kicks off that chapter is the launching point for profound exposition of Christ's nature and work on our behalf. This is deep. The preacher may well want to examine all of these food issues when he prepares for this sermon and the many more to come which center on this imagery for the Gospel. It is a sermon on food really, maybe we should ditch the alb and stole for a chef's hat and an apron! Maybe not! (If you want a fascinating study – look up the origins of the chef's hat. It has everything to do with the Moslem invasion of the Byzantine Empire, the monastic communities that sheltered Christians, and more. It is a great story.)

Collect of the Day

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, your mercies are new every morning; and though we deserve only punishment, You receive us as Your children and provide for all our needs of body and soul. Grant that we may heartily acknowledge Your merciful goodness, give thanks for all Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

God's mercies are new every morning. There is that light thing again. Lenten piety reminds us that we deserve punishment and God is merciful. The faith and the humility of the past weeks are not left behind as though we have somehow accomplished them and forgotten that. But now in that humility and looking for that mercy we ask that God would grant us to heartily acknowledge God's goodness, give thanks for the benefits and then serve in a willing obedience. I think the progression and the adjectives are really important here.

First one has to see and acknowledge the blessing, then the first reaction is “Godward,” it gives thanks. Then the next reaction is formative, it shapes our lives, we serve. That is the progression of true Christian service. Notice it does not go through fear, guilt, shame, greed or other motivators we often see for human behavior. It is the faithful obedience which Paul mentions in Romans 1. This is the willing, cheerful heart which eagerly serves God, which runs to its task

because our Father has asked us, and Jesus is beckoning and his smiling eyes assures us that he loves what we are doing.

The adjectives are also important. The acknowledgement is hearty. It is a thing of the heart and it runs to the very center of our being. This is not a superficial sort of thing, but an acknowledgment that permeates us, to our core. The thanksgiving is also modified, not by an adjective but by a prepositional phrase “for all your benefits.” The thanksgiving is universal. This is the one thing that non-Christians often notice about Christians, they know how to say “Thank you.” The last is also important: A service in willing obedience. Think about the times you have willingly obeyed. You obeyed the cries of your infant as he or she demanded attention and food. You willingly obeyed your spouse (at least once in a while.) You willingly obey directions of a preacher at church as he motions you to stand and sit. There are also many times in which you unwillingly obey: the policeman whose presence makes you slow down, the referee at a game who reins in your competitive spirit with a penalty, the doctor who tells you to lose some weight, etc.

God is after the willing obedience, the sort of thing you want to do. He knows that the way to that sort of obedience is through his love acknowledged, thanked and responded to in service. He does not demand that sort of obedience, because the demand itself would destroy it. The deed done out of a demand is no longer really a willing obedience, it is obedience to the demand. God wants your loving and cheerful obedience, and he will not be satisfied with anything less. He got that worshipful obedience from a blind man whose eyes he opened in the Gospel reading today. He gets that from you too and the whole congregation to whom you preach. This is the obedience that flows from a faithful heart, forgiven by him, loved by him, saved by him. He has given even his own Son to get it.

Do you want to read more about this willing obedience? Consider the Augsburg Confession Article VI, and the Apology Article VI, but do not stop there, you will really also want to read the Formula of Concord, Articles III and IV.

Readings

Exodus 16:2-15

They set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the people of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. ² And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, ³ and the people of Israel said to them, “Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”

⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not. ⁵ On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily.” ⁶ So Moses and Aaron said to all the people of Israel, “At evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, ⁷ and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against the LORD. For what are we, that you grumble against us?” ⁸ And Moses said, “When the LORD gives you in the evening meat to eat and in the morning bread to the full, because the LORD has heard your grumbling that you grumble against him—what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the LORD.”

⁹ Then Moses said to Aaron, “Say to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, ‘Come near before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.’” ¹⁰ And as soon as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. ¹¹ And the LORD said to Moses, ¹² “I have heard the grumbling of the people of Israel. Say to them, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.’”

¹³ In the evening quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp. ¹⁴ And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground. ¹⁵ When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, “It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat. ¹⁶ This is what the LORD has commanded: ‘Gather of it, each one of you, as much as he can eat. You shall each take an omer, according to the number of the persons that each of you has in his tent.’” ¹⁷ And the people of Israel did so. They gathered, some more, some less. ¹⁸ But when they measured it with an omer, whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack. Each of them gathered as much as he could eat. ¹⁹ And Moses said to them, “Let no one leave any of it over till the morning.” ²⁰ But they did not listen to Moses. Some left part of it till the morning, and it bred worms and stank. And Moses was angry with them. ²¹ Morning by morning they gathered it, each as much as he could eat; but when the sun grew hot, it melted.

(This text shows up in Proper 13 in series B, that falls in August. I have reproduced the lightly edited notes from the last time we treated this.)

I always pointed out to my confirmation classes that they should be grateful that they were not the wandering Israelites. They only have school cafeteria mystery meals for a few years. The Israelites spent forty years eating indeterminate cafeteria food. Manna literally means “what is it?” I spent a few years eating “What is it?” when I was in high school and college in the old Concordia system. I can see why these folks grumbled once in a while? 😊

Moses has led the people of Israel out of Egypt into one of the harshest deserts in the world. They are afraid and they are hungry and thirsty and they complain about it. Before we assume that they are all idiots, give them a break and remember that we, who are richly supplied with

altogether too many calories in our diet still find occasions to complain, even about food. Just sit in on a meal with my children if you don't believe me. In fact, just the other day I caught myself complaining about all the complaining my kids were doing.

In the earlier conversations this evening we have been talking about the biblical concept that Jesus is talking about later in the Gospel lesson. The bread of life comes in us, we have partaken, and that makes God in us. The language of the Christian is very incarnational and sacramental to describe the whole of life. Here we see this in the reaction of Moses. The people complain against Moses but he correctly notices that this is not against Moses or Aaron, they are nobodies. It is God who is in them and the complaint is borne by God.

Moses correctly identifies this as a relationship issue with God, this is a faith issue. They don't trust him. Now, if you think about this, Moses really is asking a great deal of trust of these folks. They can only gather enough for one day. I think I would go crazy knowing that I only had enough food in the house to feed my family for one day. A good father or mother would naturally want to save a little just in case a kid wakes up hungry in the middle of the night or the whole manna supply chain breaks down tomorrow morning. But even today, when there is no such restriction on how many groceries I can bring home from my weekly shopping trip, do we really do any better? Do I live my life in trust that God will take care of me or do I live my life out of a sense that I need to take care of myself because no one else is going to do it? Do I trust my bank account, my expertise, my acumen to make sure my family and I are fed? Or do I trust that God will make sure that happens? This is truly a first commandment sort of pericope.

Moses is asking the people to fear, love, and trust in God above all things. If they don't they will have to run back to Egypt. If they fear, love, and trust in God they will get up in the morning, walk out there and trust that when the dew evaporates there will be bread on the ground for them to eat. That is the test God is talking about here.

God hears the grumbling and responds, he sends quail and manna, he feeds his people, he sustains their life. They will not die in the wilderness as ought to have been the case. Garrison Keillor once said that in Minnesota you really lived because a couple times every winter, usually in January or February, Mother Nature makes a serious attempt to kill you.

God's work here has a pedagogical purpose. He wants them to know that it was he who liberated them from their slavery. The gift of the nourishment is tied to the gift of their freedom itself. That is a connection we cannot ignore. God is not just addressing my cancer, my hunger or some other problem for which I pray, but he connects that help to the very salvation which Christ as worked in the cross when he liberated us from sin and death and devil. He is not only defeating the enemy but he is concerned with the healthy and problem-free moments as well. They are all his moments.

You might also want to note that the glory of the Lord appeared and God spoke a word of nurturing and grace from that cloud. My Old Testament professor, George Heider, used to say that this glory of the Lord was what boiled off of God when he made himself locally present. Of

course, the faithful reader will immediately recognize it as the same manifestation of God's presence which was noted at the birth of Jesus in Luke's account. The glory of the Lord shone around the angels and shepherds. It also showed up when Solomon consecrated the temple.

The main theme here, and the reason we get this reading today is that God has a long history of feeding people. The image of God as a provider of sustenance is ancient, not only as a metaphor but also as a reality. Indeed, it is one of the fundamental signs of the broken sinfulness of the world that we must work hard for our daily bread and eat by the sweat of our brow. It was not supposed to be this way. The essential relationship into which we have been created involved us joyfully receiving this sustenance from God as a gift. Our food was never to have been purchased with money we called our "living" which we "earn." It was always a gift.

This might also be a time to remind folks that God is still feeding people, and he is using his preferred means to do it, you! If you are hungry in your community, one of the best places to find a meal will likely have a cross on top of the building somewhere. Christians are very active in the field of feeding hungry people. Do you participate in a local food bank, soup kitchen, homeless shelter? The same God who fed the people of Israel and the multitudes in the wilderness is at work through you!

This happens but a month or so after they have witnessed God defeating the Egyptians, parting the Red Sea, and destroying Pharaoh's army. And yet here they are complaining. Hunger is a powerful force in our lives. The fear of hunger, the pain of hunger makes us forget everything else. In the hierarchy of needs, hunger is right there – a powerful motivator that can even overcome what seems like common sense.

Is this part of our fallen nature. Our interior focus, our self-interest has blinded us to God. This is a damning reality about all of us, church goers and pagans alike. These are the children of Israel, not the Midianites or some other uncircumcised lot. They grumbled.

Sermon Idea You will see the Glory of God (That the hearer would trust in God's loving care for him/her right now.)

Too often we look a lot like these people. God has promised us that he will never slumber nor sleep (Psalm 121) or that he is the Good Shepherd (John 10). God has promised that we are worth far more than the birds of the air (Matthew 5-6) and yet we worry. He promises to listen to our prayers and that he knows what we need even before we ask for it.

And yet, the cancer, the financial insecurity, the anxiety, the politics, the relationships, even church itself can become something that oppresses us and darkens our minds and spirits. God would break into this gloom today and shine with his glory. As the prayer says, the glory of God is to have mercy. We are always in his hands.

God provided for the folks in Moses day, despite their grumbling and despite the fact that they were apparently not very good at following orders or even trusting in Moses' words or the Word of God from the glorious cloud. We should not fear that God will not care for us because we fail

to trust very well in him. God might have threatened at times to wipe out the people of Israel, but he never did.

The preacher today wants to note that the same God who rained bread down on the heads of the Israelites, the Lord who fed the multitudes in the wilderness, the Lord who calmed storms and defeated Goliath through a little shepherd boy, that God is still here. That does not mean we can tell him what to do. The people of the Exile thought that God would send another Moses, but God gave them Esther instead. She saved them from genocide by throwing dinner parties. They wanted Moses and got Martha Stewart! But God saved them through a girl. It wasn't what they thought, but it was still God.

The people would never have thought to go out and pick up bread from the desert. They were surely surprised by water from a rock and a carpet of quail. We should be prepared to be surprised. But we should not be surprised that Jesus helps us.

The preacher cannot know exactly what God will do, nor can the people, but we can trust him. No threat can ever pluck us from his hands. He promises. Count on him.

Or Isaiah 49:8-13

⁸ Thus says the LORD:

“In a time of favor I have answered you;
in a day of salvation I have helped you;

I will keep you and give you
as a covenant to the people,

to establish the land,

to apportion the desolate heritages,

⁹ saying to the prisoners, ‘Come out,’
to those who are in darkness, ‘Appear.’

They shall feed along the ways;
on all bare heights shall be their pasture;

¹⁰ they shall not hunger or thirst,
neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them,

for he who has pity on them will lead them,
and by springs of water will guide them.

¹¹ And I will make all my mountains a road,
and my highways shall be raised up.

¹² Behold, these shall come from afar,
and behold, these from the north and from the west,
and these from the land of Syene.”

¹³ Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth;
break forth, O mountains, into singing!

For the LORD has comforted his people
and will have compassion on his afflicted.

Dr. Luther would not have associated this passage with this day. The Christians of that time had no Old Testament readings as part of the lectionary. But do not think they neglected their OT. They preached on the OT a great deal, but in the daily office where whole books of the Bible were slowly read and preached over the days, weeks, and months of the year. I have mentioned it before, but when the Cistercian St. Bernard of Clairvaux died, he was in the middle of a sermon series on the Song of Solomon. He had preached sermon 84 in the series and was only onto chapter 3. They were taking a deep dive into an OT book which we hardly read.

These words of Isaiah remind us that the Lenten fast was relaxed on Sundays. For most of our people this is the only fasting they will have all year, but for much of Christian history, good pastoral care relaxed the fast of ascetic and rigorous people on Sunday. This passage speaks of God's delicious comfort for people. He will lead them to sweet water and good pasture. He will build a highway in the desert and they will not be afraid.

Finally the very heavens and mountains are exhorted to sing for joy. They had been the witnesses who had been invoked when God made the covenant with his people and thus would have had the sad duty of bearing witness against them as the covenantal stipulations were carried out and the people were deported into exile (Deut 4:26, 30:19, 31:28, et al.) Now those same witness are given a reason to rejoice. God has had mercy on the people whom he had every right to destroy. God leads them back home.

Psalm 132:8-18

⁸ Arise, O LORD, and go to your resting place,
you and the ark of your might.

⁹ Let your priests be clothed with righteousness,
and let your saints shout for joy.

¹⁰ For the sake of your servant David,
do not turn away the face of your anointed one.

¹¹ The LORD swore to David a sure oath
from which he will not turn back:

“One of the sons of your body
I will set on your throne.

¹² If your sons keep my covenant
and my testimonies that I shall teach them,
their sons also forever
shall sit on your throne.”

¹³ For the LORD has chosen Zion;
he has desired it for his dwelling place:
¹⁴ “This is my resting place forever;
here I will dwell, for I have desired it.
¹⁵ I will abundantly bless her provisions;
I will satisfy her poor with bread.
¹⁶ Her priests I will clothe with salvation,
and her saints will shout for joy.
¹⁷ There I will make a horn to sprout for David;
I have prepared a lamp for my anointed.
¹⁸ His enemies I will clothe with shame,
but on him his crown will shine.”

Galatians 4:21-31

²¹ Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? ²² For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. ²³ But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. ²⁴ Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. ²⁵ Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. ²⁶ But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. ²⁷ For it is written,

“Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear;
break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor!
For the children of the desolate one will be more
than those of the one who has a husband.”

²⁸ Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. ²⁹ But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. ³⁰ But what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.” ³¹ So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.

Luther says, rather brusquely in his postils on this passage that the preacher should just avail himself of his commentary and not expect him to repeat himself. Luther’s treatment of this allegory in his commentary is quite extensive. I have attempted to give you a handful of excerpts from it, however, I highly recommend the whole passage.

Luther

Paul wanted to close the epistle here. He did not want to write any more. No, he wanted to be present in person and to speak with the Galatians. But while he is anxious in his mind about his

matter, he introduces this allegory at this point; it probably occurred to him here. The common people are deeply moved by allegories and parables; therefore Christ also used them often. They are like pictures of a sort, which show things to simple people as though before their very eyes and for this reason have a profound effect on the mind especially of an uneducated person. First he strikes the ears of the Galatians with words and writing; then with this allegory he beautifully portrays the same thing to their eyes.

Now Paul was a very fine craftsman at presenting allegories; for he made a practice of applying them to the teaching of faith, to grace, and to Christ, not to the Law and to works, as Origen and Jerome did. These men deserve to be criticized, because they make awkward and inept allegories out of the simplest statements of Scripture, in which allegories have no place...

²² For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. ²³ But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise.

...You will find that Abraham had two sons, Ishmael by Hagar and Isaac by Sarah. Both were true sons of Abraham...And yet there is a difference. Even though Isaac was born of the flesh, this was preceded by God's promising and naming him. No one but Paul has ever observed this difference, which he gathered this way on the basis of the text of Genesis...

But because Ishmael was not promised to Abraham by God, he was a son only according to the flesh, not according to the promise. Therefore he was expected and born by chance, like other children. For no mother knows whether she is going to have a child; or if she senses that she is pregnant, she still does not know whether it will be a boy or a girl. But Isaac was named definitely in Gen. 17:19.

²⁴ Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar.

Allegories do not provide solid proofs in theology; but, like pictures, they adorn and illustrate a subject...But because he has already fortified his case with more solid arguments – based on experience, on the case of Abraham, on the evidence of Scripture, and on analogy – now, at the end of the argument, he adds an allegory as a kind of ornament...

²⁵ Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia;

Abraham is a type (*figura*) of God, who has two sons, that is two nations, represented by Ishmael and Isaac. They were born of Hagar and Sarah, who signify the two covenants, the old and the new. The old covenant is from Mt. Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar...Therefore just as Hagar the slave truly gave birth to a son for Abraham, not an heir but a slave, so Sinai, the allegorical Hagar truly gave birth to a son for God, namely, a physical people. And just as Ishmael was a true son of Abraham, so the people of Israel have the true God as their Father, who gave them His Law and supplied them with His oracles, with a religion, a form

of worship, and a temple...Nevertheless, this was the difference: Ishmael was born of the slave according to the flesh, that is, without a promise; therefore he could not be the heir. Thus the mystical Hagar, that is, Mt. Sinai, on which the Law was given and the old covenant established, gave birth to a people for God, the great Abraham, yet without a promise, that is, a physical and enslaved people, not an heir of God...

Therefore the promises of God are conditional. They do not promise life freely; they promise it to those who keep the Law. Therefore they leave consciences in doubt, because no one keeps the Law. But the promises of the new covenant do not have any condition attached; they do not demand anything of us; they do not depend on our worthiness as a condition. Instead, they bring and grant us the forgiveness of sins, grace, righteousness and eternal life freely, for Christ's sake.

²⁵ Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.

This is a marvelous allegory. Just as Paul made Sinai into Hagar earlier, so now he would like to make Jerusalem into Sarah but neither dares nor is able to so do. Instead, he is compelled to associate Jerusalem with Mt. Sinai; for he says that it applies to Hagar,...I for my part would not have had the courage to handle this allegory in this manner. I would rather have said that Jerusalem is Sarah, or the new covenant, especially since it was there that the preaching of the Gospel began, the Holy Spirit was granted,...and I would have thought that I had constructed a very apt allegory. Therefore no everyone has the skill to play around with allegories...Now Paul does indeed make Sarah into Jerusalem – yet not the physical Jerusalem, which he simply attaches to Hagar, but the spiritual and heavenly Jerusalem, where the Law does not rule and the physical people are not enslaved with their children as they are in Jerusalem, but where the promise rules and the spiritual people are free.

²⁶ But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother.

The earthly Jerusalem, says Paul, which is down below and has the authority of the Law, is Hagar and is in slavery with its children; that is, it is not set free from the Law, sin, and death...Now the heavenly Jerusalem above is the church, that is, believers scattered throughout the world, who have the same Gospel, the same faith in Christ, the same Holy Spirit, and the same sacraments...We should know that Paul is contrasting the Jerusalem that is above with the earthly Jerusalem, not spatially but spiritually. Spiritual things are distinct from physical or earthly things. Spiritual things are “above”; earthly things are “below.” ... For the spiritual Jerusalem, which began in the physical Jerusalem, has not prescribed location, as the one in Judea does; but it is scattered throughout the world and can be in Babylonia, Tukey, Tartary, Scythia, India, Italy, or Germany, on the islands of the sea, on mountains, in valleys, and everywhere in the world where there are men who have the Gospel and believe in Christ.

I have said this several times before, and I repeat now – for this is a thing that cannot be emphasized enough – that the Christian who by faith takes hold of the benefits of Christ has no Law at all but is free of it.

(Luther's Works, Vol 26. Ed.: Jaroslav Pelikan. CPH, 1963. Pp. 432-48)

Luther's words are worthy of reading and surely he could not have said this better than he did. One can see why he simply pointed the readers of his postil notes here. Of particular value, I thought, was his adept analysis of Paul's use of the allegory, its role in both theology and the letter, its surprising turn, and its effect on the hearer.

This passage often flummoxes the modern reader, but most of the modern readers don't really get the argument in Galatians either. I was surprised to see that the editor of the text did not even understand Luther's comment about the argument of the letter. He makes a strange attempt at connecting the argument of the letter to the first chapters, etc. but the real argument starts at the end of chapter 2 and is worth examining anew here because as Luther says, it is foundation for the allegory we read here:

2:17-21 – the summary of the argument: I have died to the law so that I may now live to God.

Christ lives in me. My whole live is now defined by Jesus Christ who gave his life for me. This does not nullify the law, but it does put the law in its proper place which is subservient to Christ and his work.

3:1-5 – an argument from experience – the Galatians received the Holy Spirit before they had done anything at all. Apparently it fell on them as Paul preached. At least that is what happened when Peter preached to Cornelius' house in Acts 10.

3:6-9 – an argument from the Torah – Abraham believed and it was credited to him as righteousness. Thus all who believe are the fulfillment of the Torah promise that through Abraham all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

3:10-14 – an argument from reason – The law is not going to work. If you break one rule, you are a rule breaker, it doesn't matter how often you kept the law. The one who is justified by the law has to do it. That is not happening. Rather it is by something else, as Jesus became the one who bore the curse of the law for us.

3:15-18 – an argument from legal precedent – a later covenant does not abrogate an earlier covenant's authority. The Sinai covenant came 430 years after the covenant God made with Abraham and that justification came by faith. Abraham could not have kept the Law of Moses because Moses wasn't born yet!

3:19—22 – This does not mean the law is bad, far from it, but it is simply not what we think it is. It is a servant of God, an intermediary, which was necessary to bring us to the gracious place we are now standing. The Law serves that purpose, but it is not an end unto itself.

3:23-4:7 – an illustration of the Law’s purpose, comparing it to a tutor who disciplines a child until he is mature. Now the fulfillment of the Law has come. We are all the sons of God, heirs according to the promise, not slaves, but sons.

Sermon Idea: Children of the Promise (That the Holy Spirit would create/sustain within the hearer the deep trust that Christ has set him/her free from the curse of the Law.)

I would like to entitle this sermon “Sons of the Promise” but you will have to see how that flies where you are. I think the whole gender inclusive thing really misses an important element of Paul which is radically feminist. In the ancient world sons inherited differently than daughters did. Even today, it is only in western and industrialized societies that women have some of the legal rights we take for granted. In much of the world, a daughter simply has a different legal standing. When Paul says in Galatians 3:28 that there are no longer male or female, I think he is making a radical and feminist sort of statement. There is no distinction in the grace of God. Men and women inherit the kingdom in exactly the same way. Of course, we already think this and so we are not shocked by it. But then we turn around and beg for inclusive language, “sons and daughters of God” immediately creating a second category of heir when Paul is deliberately smashing those distinctions. This is particularly problematic if you have immigrants or refugees in your congregation from one of the non-western nations where women do inherit differently than men do.

Here, when he calls us “sons of the promise” he is not excluding the women in your parish, he is radically including them in a way which the first century would have found shocking and which made early Christianity very appealing to women. I don’t know that I want to go into that with this sermon, but you will have to gauge where your hearers are at on this.

We all like to think that we can hack it as sons of Sinai. It is a really powerful narrative and temptation that just happens to coincide with the American narrative of independence and self-sufficiency. We image that we can do it ourselves, we can put our mind to it. After all if we could put a man on the moon, surely I can... But the brutal reality of this fight is that we have already lost it. We lost it long ago and we have been born into a slavery which is so pervasive and thorough that we don’t even recognize it as such and certainly cannot escape it. We think it is normal. We cannot even imagine any other sort of life.

But Christ did not expect us to extricate ourselves from this mess. He did not even wait for us to take the first step toward freedom. He came to us, broke into this prison house of slavery and death, breathed our poisoned air, and died our death, becoming the curse we all bore by our birth. He has given us this freedom. In fact, he has given it to the whole of humanity, for Jesus ran the whole human race. He became a human being, a man, who was born, lived, hurt, rejoiced, ate, sweated, slept, and died. That was not play acting on his part, but that was real life he lived. And he did it so that he could give his righteousness to you.

Now you are adopted into this wonderful family, you are made a child of God's promise. Just as Isaac was a miracle baby, an infant born to a woman impossibly old to have a baby, God has miraculously brought you to life. You are not a child of the old way, the covenant of the brutal celestial economy of do and be rewarded. You are a child of God's amazing promise.

Now this is hard for us. The chains can be somewhat comfortable. We know what they feel like and they reassure us in some strange way. We might even slip them back on, imagining that we somehow are completing those tasks which used to be impossible and still are. All the while the locks stand open and the shackles are not latched.

Many years ago my mother gave me a watch. It was a nice watch. She worked at a gift store and she got the employee discount. It was just at the time when these things were transitioning so I might be somewhat excused for this, but I have to tell you that I wound that watch dutifully for nearly two years until one day it simply stopped. It would not go any more. I brought it in, wondering what was wrong. My mother laughed so hard at me. The watch had a battery. I had been winding a watch which needed no winding for the past two years. So it is with those who would labor under that old covenant of Sinai. Christ has freed us. As Dr. Luther says, there simply is no Law for us anymore, it does not condemn us and it does not impel us.

Please don't think this means that this is now a free-for-all. We are called and bound by a much nobler and better motive, nothing less than the love of God which moves us to do much more. But that doing is completely different than the doing of the old covenant. That doing is the merry joy of dancing with someone you love, it is the obedience of loving, listening to, and serving the light of your life. The heir might be out in the field toiling away side by side with the slaves, but his motive is completely different. It is his farm, you see. He working for his dad.

Or Acts 2:41-47

⁴¹ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³ And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

John 6:1-15

After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias.
² And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick.
³ Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. ⁴ Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. ⁵ Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?” ⁶ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. ⁷ Philip answered him, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little.” ⁸ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, ⁹ “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?” ¹⁰ Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number. ¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹² And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, “Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost.” ¹³ So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten. ¹⁴ When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, “This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!”

¹⁵ Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

Luther (*Do we long for the good old days when a man was considered poor who had only one keg of home brew in his basement?*)

1. This miracle of the feeding of the five thousand men, which our dear Lord Jesus Christ performed in the wilderness with five barley loaves and two fish, is recorded in Scripture for our sakes, so that people in the church might hear it again and again, and learn from it. That we must trust that God will provide for us. For in this world, faith is under constant siege either by Mammon and wealth on the one hand, or by poverty on the other. The rich “Haves” throw God’s Word to the wind and trample it with their feet, like those in the Gospel account (Luke 14) who were invited to the great banquet but disdained to come because of their concern for property, oxen, a new wife, and so on. The “Have Nots” are ready to sell their souls to the devil in order to surmount their poverty in this world. Neither side does right; both are wrong. The rich despise God’s Word and opine that they need neither God, nor his Word. The poor ask, How can I accept the Word, follow and be obedient to it when I am so poor and need something to eat and to drink? If I expect hand-outs from other people, then I must fawn upon them and do what they want, whether I like it or not. Those who grovel this way before others, prostitute themselves, become godless louts, and do what others want them to do. As a result, whether it’s riches on the right, or poverty on the left, God’s Word and faith are under constant threat.

2. Against these two extremes, both of which become obstructions to the intended purpose, the Lord here exhorts a middle course teaching that we must come to rely on God, trust him in

every need, and learn to be content with what he daily provides us. No matter that you are not rich, you will not starve or suffer want. God will see to it that you have as much as a king, who really has no more than a common Christian. For even though he has a great kingdom, what more does a king have than sufficient food, drink, clothes to wear, a place to stay warm, and a bed to sleep in? By himself he cannot drink up all the wine his land produces, nor squander all its wealth by himself. When he dies, his eating and drinking cease, and that's no more or less than his true for the average Christian too, who, though he may not have as much as a king, still has his needs met like a king.

3. Through this miracle, therefore, Christ, our dear Lord, teaches his disciples and us Christians not to fret nor to be greedy for great wealth, because what we need will be provided. Only believe that the heavenly Father will sustain you. And just see what a paradigm he sets here before our eyes to prompt our faith. I, too, am poor and possess nothing, he is saying, and my seventy-two disciples and twelve apostles also have nothing more than five loaves of bread and two fish, plus two hundred pence in cash. On top of that, there are five thousand men with me, not counting a large following of women and children, all of whom would like to eat. You wonder whether I am poor, with but five loaves and two fish, and no bread to be had here in the wilderness that I might buy some? And yet it is imperative that I feed them all, and with such bounty that there will ultimately be four times as much left as was originally required. Now then that's the sermon the Lord wants us to hear.

4. His point is very plain and easy for us to comprehend and learn. It is very true that in poverty and want people begin to argue among themselves and say, I have only one, two, perhaps five gulden, only one keg of home brew, and so and so many bushels of grain; when this is all gone, that's it, there is no more. When such thoughts arise we should think of this miracle and ask: Is there not something more I have? Whether I have much or little, I will trust in God to sustain me according to his good pleasure, and I will let him worry if and when I require more; for I have heard the Gospel lesson preached, how Christ fed five thousand with five loaves and two fishes in the wilderness, and why should I then worry or be in doubt!

5. We should, therefore, use this incident for the sake of exercising and strengthening our faith. It was not just written for us to read (the devil can do that also), but should remind and prompt us to say, What Christ did in the wilderness he will and can do again, if only I trust him; he will provide food for me to eat, if not in super-abundance, yet sufficient to care for my necessity.

7. With this miracle, therefore, Christ wants to draw us to faith, so that we trust him. In gist he is saying, I will indeed sustain you, only believe. If you do, I will cause two fish to become three thousand in my hand, and one loaf of bread a thousand. Year of year I cause this to happen. In winter the trees are bare, having neither leaves nor fruit; but as soon as summer arrives the trees put forth leaves, cherries, plums apples, pears, and o on. There is no dough, or glue, or wood from which one could whittle these, only useless dry twigs. The same is true for the grain;

it grows from the earth in the field and is gathered into huge piles. Who clothes the trees with leaves and fruit? Who causes the grain to grow in abundance? Is it not he who with two fish and five loaves of bread fed five thousand men?

8. But now human reason remonstrates: of course that's true of the trees, the fields, and other things every year, but hardly something unusual or a wonder; but this happening, to feed five thousand men with two fish and five loaves was unusual and a miracle. And the devil thanks you for this observation. Where does the fault lie that this is looked upon as something unusual and a miracle, while producing manifold return from a single kernel of grain does not seem unusual and miraculous? The fault does not lie with God and his providence but with our incredulity, because we are so blind and obstinate that we cannot recognize God's miraculous works. And that same sort of incredulity causes us not only to be blind but to become clods with stony hearts, otherwise we would always be learning and daily comforting ourselves with God's great miracles. Christians should recognize God's wonders and from them learn to rely upon him. Why would we even want to despair? The cherry tree doesn't, even though in winter it stands bare without leaves or fruit. It trusts the word God has spoken. Burst forth in summer and blossom! And relies on it. With summer's advent it leaves out and blossoms. The field also does not despair even though in winter it lies frozen and covered with snow, without one blade of grass for us to see. We ought to learn from these everyday wonders to trust in God and no despair. Even though at times our circumstances are meager, it is no cause for worry, our necessities will be provided for, if we but trust our God.

11. The second lesson of this Gospel is to see how our dear Lord Jesus commanded that the fragments be gathered up, that nothing went to waste. This also is a very necessary lesson. Experience teaches us that when God gives little, people despair, thinking that they will die of hunger; when they are given an abundance, they become profligate and despise God's blessing. This is what happens in lordly circles where the leftovers are shamefully wasted and pitched away as useless. Our Lord desires waste as little as he wants despair and worry, desiring that we opt for the middle course, that is, trust him and carefully husband what is left over. The well-known proverb still obtains: Waste not, want not!

12. This applies not only to bread, but to all the gifts of God, bodily or spiritual. These are good times. Today God's Word is in style and the economy flourishes. But how many people are there who live up their hands in thanks to God? People despise both God's Word and their own industry, carelessly trampling over both. The wise man will gather and carefully store away supplies for the time of need. For God will not always provide a new supply of bread when the surplus was allowed to go to waste and instead of conserving what he created and bestowed.

14. In these days we have industrial pursuits that are richly productive, if we only had sufficient buckets to gather it all. Likewise, Holy Scripture is available everywhere. The bounty overflows and becomes like crumbs which the dogs are not inclined to eat. Look you young folks, you

ought to be like baskets to gather it in. The time will come when people will wish for one page where now there's an entire library. After these plentiful times will come such impoverishment that people will wish for one single sermon where now there are hundreds. This was my experience under the papacy: I would gladly have traveled to Rome to hear an honest-to-goodness gospel sermon, but here was not even one.

(*Sermons of Martin Luther: The House Postils*, Vol. 1. Ed.: Eugene Klug. Baker Press, 1996. Pp. 344-350.)

Luther places the hearer squarely in the minds of the disciples or with their butts on the ground among the multitudes of hungry people in the Gospel reading today. And well he should. It is the clearest and most preachable approach to this text. But Luther's generation included a great number of people who were food insecure. Most of the folks who will be sitting in LCMS parishes this week will be food secure, indeed, their physicians may opine that they are too food secure and could do with a little deprivation of the caloric variety. But are Luther's words in the second part of this perhaps important for us to hear? Did you read the National Geographic article a couple of years ago now about food waste? Here is a link to a related article on their website. <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2015/01/150122-food-waste-climate-change-hunger/>

I remember a picture around the same time of a field of celery that had been harvested. Apparently those perfect celery bundles we buy in the grocery are only possible because the farmer simply leaves about half of the celery stalks in the field to rot. There is nothing really wrong with them, they were just growing at the wrong angle so they won't make a perfect stack in the produce department. The farmers had tried to find a use for them, but it cost more to pick them up, clean, and remove them than even any of the food banks wanted to deal with. So they rot in the field and people really are hungry on our streets. Something is wrong with this picture.

Does Jesus feeding the multitudes gives a chance to talk about that?

I had the privilege when I was in Utah to help start a foodbank and see a miracle. This was an effort of some very small Christian parishes in a very Mormon city. But we heard there were hungry people in town so we were going to feed them. We thought we could sustain a monthly gathering and distribution of about 40 bags of food to families. It was not envisioned to be a large operation. Within one year we were handing out ten times that much food. We had a gymnasium that was stacked five feet deep in canned, dried, and preserved food. How did that happen? Lots of things happened, but I like to think that the same Jesus who multiplied the loaves of the little boy in the story today also multiplied the gifts of these Christians. Yes, he did it through the postal employees gathering for us, through members asking for food at the grocery stores, yes, even through a local LDS Ward whose members spent a whole day at their dry packing facility boxing up breakfast cereals for us.

Sermon Idea Where shall we buy bread so these people may eat? (That the Holy Spirit would embolden the hearer to acts of service and love.)

Jesus asks the question in the title of this sermon to test his disciples. He knows all along where there is enough bread for this crowd. He will make it. But he asks them. He demands that they come with an answer. Their answer is pathetically small. They bring forward a boy with five loaves and two fish who is willing to share the lunch his mother probably packed for him. If you have never read the Arch Book version of this, it is well done. It might even make a good children's lesson.

Too often we hear that question and we do not assume the answer Jesus would have us reach. We look at the profound problems of our world out there, the hunger, the loneliness, the schools that are troubled, the drug addicts sleeping under our bridges, the schizophrenic man who mutters around town and sometimes makes us afraid, and we look in our bank account and find it lacking. We turn from Jesus' call to feed his hungry people and we shamefacedly skulk into the corner of life, locking the doors of our church, keeping the world and its problems out there.

Jesus disciples, for all their usual idiocy, finally get one of these things right. This is because they are being schooled by a child. A little boy offers up his lunch. It is important to note here that he does not apparently eat his lunch and offer the leftovers. He gives it all to Jesus. Jesus does not say to his disciples, have a bite for yourself and we will see what is left for the hungry folks out on the lawn. He has them bring the whole but paltry sum to him. He takes it all from them. He breaks and blesses it, and apparently returns five loaves and two fish to his disciples and tells them to ring the dinner bell.

You have to wonder if the disciples did not turn around and face that crowd with half a piece of bread each and did they whisper "Come, and get it." What was that like to hand out a piece of bread to one, then another, another, another, another, and finally to realize that this was just going on and on. What went through their minds as they gathered up the basket full of leftovers. Did they think about that little boy who ended up with a bigger lunch than he started with? Did they chew on their own barley loaf in stunned silence? Did they ever look at a hungry person quite the same way? Did they ever consider their own resources as finite again?

God calls his people to serve and love this world. We are not called upon to marshal resources and carefully squirrel away what we have until judgment day. Indeed, when Christ returns he really should find the church up to its eyeballs in debt because it is doing ministry, feeding the hungry, healing the sick, teaching the children, etc. That is what Jesus did and that is the life to which he is calling us.

This is not easy. The disciples looked at the hungry multitudes and Jesus had apparently only given them five loaves of bread to share. That took guts and faith. It is much safer to say that our budget is tight and we cannot help because we have pastors to pay, lights to keep on, and communion wine to buy. But can we really sit by that little boy in church today and think that way?

Luther urged his people to look at nature and see that God miraculously provides. For Luther that would happen through a wife. They said when Katie moved into the Augustinian priory where

Luther lived with a servant named Wolfe, that he was on the verge of bankruptcy and nearly starving in squalor. He refused ever to take a penny of income from his books. But God gave him Katie. Soon she had the place cleaned up, a garden planted, was brewing beer in the basement and selling it to college students (an excellent business plan, btw). Soon Luther was filling out his cassock a little more amply. For the rest of his life, God provided for him and her.

I tell a story above about a foodbank I was privileged to be a part of in Utah. You would do well with your own story of God's great providence. Call people to step forth in confident faith. God is still interested in feeding the hungry, helping the bedraggled outcast, welcoming the stranger, forgiving the sinner, and comforting the grieving. He does it now through you!