

SERMON JULY 21 2024 "True Rest."

Dear fellow redeemed of, by, and for Christ Jesus, God has a way of giving us what we don't know we need.

The disciples come back from the mission on which Jesus had sent them—to preach repentance to the people, to heal the sick, and to cast out demons—and they tell Jesus, **probably excitedly, everything they had done and everything they had said. Jesus says to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desert place and rest for a little while."**

Mark explains that people were coming in and going out so much that they had no time even to eat. So they cross the lake in a boat and come to a desert place.

But when they got there, the people had already beaten them there. They are waiting for the boat to get to the other side. Waiting when Jesus and the disciples get out of the boat.

But Jesus doesn't tell them to wait while He and His disciples take a break and eat some food and come back in a couple of hours. Jesus looks at them and has compassion on them, feeling mercy for them in His guts.

They are like sheep without a shepherd. Wandering aimlessly. Going in every direction, scattered like the people of Israel at Jeremiah's time.

They have no leaders to guide them to the Messiah. No one to say, like John the Baptizer, **“See! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”**

I don't know what all those people thought they needed from Jesus. No doubt, within those 5000-plus people there were some just like you, with whatever you brought with you into this place.

Some who had experienced the joy of a new birth; some whose loved ones had died; some who had new jobs; some husbands and wives who weren't talking to each other; some parents and children who were fighting. Whatever joy or sorrow you have today, there were some in that crowd experiencing similar things. Whatever it was each of them needed,

Jesus gives them exactly what they need, whether they knew it or not. He begins to teach them many things. When Jesus teaches, He is not merely giving information. He is not giving facts and figures, not describing God—at least not primarily.

He is not giving them a series of steps to a better life; He is giving them the Word that is life itself. Jesus' word is the word that created everything that exists. His word is the word that sustains and keeps everything that exists.

Jesus is the Word of God in flesh. When He speaks the Law of God, the people know the sorrow of their sin.

When He tells them what God is doing for them, they rejoice in their forgiveness. They are refreshed and restored. No matter what is happening in their lives, each of them receives exactly what he needs.

By this time, it seems that the disciples are becoming impatient. I don't know what they're thinking, but I know what I'd be thinking. Jesus, you said we were coming to a desert place by ourselves to rest. When are we going to rest?

This is a desert place, they say (exactly where Jesus said they were going). The hour is late. Send the people away to the surrounding towns and villages so they can buy for themselves something to eat.

Now, maybe the disciples only have the best interests of the people at heart, but if they're anything like me, there is, maybe, just a little selfish desire to be done with all the people and be by themselves.

But Jesus knows what the disciples need, too. He says, You give them something to eat. You give them something to eat. I can feel the panic rising up in the chests of the disciples.

I know it because those are the same words that Jesus gives to His undershepherds, His pastors, in every place: **You give them something to eat.**

Week by week, in houses, and hospital rooms, and in the pulpit: you give them something to eat. The disciples want to know how they're going to afford all that food; where are they to get it?

Jesus says, how much do you have? Five loaves and two fish. Jesus gives no explanation of how that's going to be enough, but He has the people sit down in banqueting groups—that's the sense of the word—on the green grass. (Where'd the green grass come from in that desert place?)

They sit in banqueting groups, like those in the Roman Empire where people would gather together around a glass or three of wine to discuss important things. Literally, it means to drink wine together. So they sit down in groups—like garden plots, Mark says. Neat little plots of 100 or 50, Mark says.

Maybe it's a coincidence, or maybe not, that's about the size of the average congregation, but either way, we've moved from wandering sheep without a shepherd to organized banqueting groups on green grass in the middle of the wilderness.

They have heard the words of Jesus, and now their shepherd is about to feed them. Just like Psalm 23 promised: **Yahweh is my Shepherd. He makes me lie down on green grass.**

He leads me beside waters of rest, and nourishes me with food.

Jesus takes that bread and fish, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to...His disciples. And His disciples hand it out. You give them something to eat; here, give them this.

By the time they're done, they must have been quite a bit more tired than they were before; 5000 divided by 12 is still a lot. But Jesus knows what they need, too.

When they're done, how much is left? One basket for each of them. Tired, disciples? Impatient, disciples? Hungry, disciples? Jesus gives them exactly what He gives the people: the same word and the same food. The same forgiveness, the same Body and Blood for both pastor and people.

More than enough, not even close to running out. Jesus gives and gives and gives. He knows what you and I need, and He gives it so that everyone is satisfied.

So He has gathered us here in this banqueting group that we call Trinity Lutheran Church. Gathered us here to rest in the middle of the wilderness of this world, bringing us together with all of our needs, all of our desires, all of our experiences.

This is not a place to air our petty complaints and what we think we want; it is His place of rest in the glorious mercy of God.

And He gives us exactly what we need: His Word and His Food. Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.

Rest in Him, until we have eternal rest from sin and death and the burdens of this creation. Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Blessed indeed, says the Holy Spirit, because they rest from their labor, because their works follow them.

Their works follow them because they have all been done in the Lord. He gives us what He knows we need, more than enough for you and for me. AMEN