

Mark 8.1-9
7th Sunday after Trinity
4 August 2019
St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

+ INI +

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

“In those days,’ declares the LORD, ‘when you have multiplied and increased in the land, they shall no more say, “The ark of the covenant of the LORD.”’” Promise. Jeremiah chapter 3. A new mercy seat, ark, and temple.

“In those days the house of Judah shall join the house of Israel, and together they shall come from the land of the north to the land that I gave your fathers for a heritage.” Promise. Jeremiah chapter 3. The prosperity of the holy church.

“In those days they shall no longer say, ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.’” Promise. Jeremiah chapter 31. The curse of the law lifted.

“In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and He shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’” Promise. Jeremiah 33. A people made righteous by David’s righteous branch.

“In those days and in that time, declares the LORD, the people of Israel and the people of Judah shall come together, weeping as they come, and they shall seek the LORD their God. They shall ask the way to Zion, with faces turned toward it, saying, ‘Come, let us join ourselves to the LORD in an everlasting covenant that will never be forgotten.’” Promise. Jeremiah 50. Faith worked in the hearts of the repentant.

“In those days and in that time, declares the LORD, iniquity shall be sought in Israel, and there shall be none, and sin in Judah, and none shall be found, for I will pardon those whom I leave as a remnant.” Promise. Jeremiah 50. Sins forgiven.

“In those days, ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, ‘Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.’” Promise. Zechariah chapter 8. The glorious mission of God throughout the world.

“In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus....And Mary gave birth to her First-Born Son.” Luke chapter 2.

“In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.... And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are My beloved Son; with You I am well-pleased.’” Mark chapter 1.

“In those days, when again a great multitude had gathered, and they did not have anything to eat, Jesus summoned His disciples and said to them, ‘I have compassion on the multitude.’”
Mark chapter 8. Promise. Fulfilled.

For here, in Christ, the Lord unveils the whole kahoona.

Christ, the new ark of the covenant—the Mercy Seat of God—in the womb of the Blessed Virgin. For the multitudes.

Christ, the curse-lifter. For them!

Christ, the Bridegroom who does it backwards and gives the Bride her dowry—all that He is and has—holiness, righteousness, life, salvation.

Christ, the sin-forgiver. Their sins.

Christ, the faith-worker. For the faith of the multitude was not of their own doing; it was a gift of God, lest any of them should boast.

Christ, the giver of heavenly food—Himself, the Bread that comes down from heaven.

Christ, the harvester in the fields white for harvest.

All of God’s promises. Fulfilled in Christ.

It’s no wonder, then, that the people followed Him. 3 long days. In the wilderness. Far away from civilization with all its markets. Far away from hearth and home with their jars of flour and oil and kitchens.

For the multitude had found the Kingdom of God and sought it first. And the righteousness the Lord *gives for the sake of Christ*. In Christ, they exchanged their hard labor under the curse of sin for Him who was their Sabbath rest, and the sour grapes of wrath for the blessing of Jesus, who is the sweet Bread of Life.

Fellow-redeemed: just as the Lord Jesus did for the multitude so He done for you. For the promise has been fulfilled for you, too.

“In those days” through the faithful witness of Christ’s holy people, you were made the harvest gathered into Christ’s barns.

“In those days” you were visited from on high in the washing of regeneration. And made a child of God. Released from all your sins by Him whose blood fills the water taken in His name. And joined through faith in Him who in “in those days” became your brother in womb of the Virgin.

“In those days”—even today—you receive the forgiveness of all your sins by the Sin-Forgiver.

“In those days”—even today—the Bridegroom comes to you again with His sweet words to woo you as His Bride.

“In those days”—even today—you are made to dwell safely within the walls of Jerusalem, Christ’s Holy Church. Promises made. Promises fulfilled. For you.

But now, there they are, the 4,000, along with their wives and children, in the middle of the wilderness! Their supply of food run out. Legitimate fears that even the voyage home would do them in.

That’s how the Christian life often feels. You come where Christ draws you to Himself. And then you look around and think about what you’ve lost. The 4,000 in the wilderness, they feared for their own lives.

And you—you fear for no less. You fear that following Jesus will close down opportunities. That’s why it’s so hard to pack up the kids on Sunday morning and bring them to church instead of the soccer field.

You fear that following Jesus—well, it’s just a little too confining. [Is it really true I should look for nothing else but a pious Lutheran spouse? Is it really true that if I put the gifts the Lord gave to work in the service of the Church I won’t get to use my gifts another way? Is it really true that it matters where my treasure is stored up—in my bank account or in heaven?]

You fear that following Jesus might not be all it’s cracked up to be. [After a godly Christian life on earth, clinging in faith to Jesus, will I really enter the joy of heaven? And what everything I’m missing out on?]

You fear that everything’s going to turn out for you like it did for Job and that you’ll come to the realization—and maybe far too late—that “it profits a man nothing that he should take delight in God.”

That’s the flesh talking. And the catechism of the world. And the devil’s whispering in your ear.

But Christian faith slices through these fears like a hot knife through soft butter.

Is it worth it? the flesh asks.

And faith responds: “Behold, the 4,000. In the middle of the wilderness. Life in the balance. But don’t regard what you can see. Look at their faith. And hear them say by their actions: ‘If we have Christ we have everything.’”

If only they can have the sin-forgiving, curse-lifting Mercy Seat of God.

If only they can be the Bride to the Bridegroom—to this Bridegroom who takes no dowry from the Bride, but gives her one—His life and salvation.

If only they can have Jesus, the Bread of Life....

Then what do they lack?

Nothing.

What do you lack?

In Christ, your conscience is cleansed by His blood and freed from the fear of God's eternal punishment and wrath. In Christ, you have not only this life, but the next.

So what fear? What cause of fear? What thing? What missed opportunity? What apparent confinement or disappointment could separate you from the Lord Jesus? What could stand in the way of following Him into the wilderness for three days, as it were—100 times or 1,000 times?

For you follow Him knowing not only His great and many gifts to you. But knowing His heart. For all those gifts—they are undeserved gifts. All those gifts—they are nothing but mercy. All those gifts—they are nothing but compassion.

And the Lord Jesus does have compassion on you. He knows your fears. He knows the dangers you face. He knows your temptations. He knows them because He's all-knowing, to be sure. But even more, He knows them because He's your Brother. Back there in Palestine, He was hungry, too. For He wears your flesh. And even today at the throne of the Father pleads for you in the flesh He bears.

And far from dismissing you for your fear, danger, and temptation. Far from divorcing His beloved Bride, the Church. Far from withholding His blessing from you who faint upon the way—He instead has compassion. Σπλάγχνα [*splángchna*]. Deep. Belly-felt compassion. As if it comes from the core of His being. Because it does.

A compassion that He's already demonstrated by pouring the life-blood from His veins for you. A compassion that He's already exercised by rescuing from your sin and your death and the devil's power.

A compassion that fed 4,000 in the middle of the wilderness with good food.

A compassion that feeds you even today with the very Body broken and the blood shed in His compassion for you.

Promises given. Promises fulfilled. In Christ

Amen.

pax domini, etc.

sdg
jsb

