

3 August 2008  
Pentecost 12

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

## Jesu Juva

“Both Guests and Givers”

Text: Matthew 14:13-21 (Isaiah 55:1-5; Romans 9:1-5)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

The disciples were sensible, and sending the people home was the sensible thing to do. After all, it was getting late in the day and the people needed food. So dismiss them, Jesus. Tell them that’s all for today, go home and get a bite to eat.

**But Jesus does not live within the boundaries of the sensible.** It was not sensible to tell fishermen who had been fishing all night and caught nothing to go back out in the day when the fish went deep and try again – *but Jesus did*, and provided a great catch. It was not sensible to assert that a girl who had died was simply asleep – *but Jesus did*, and then showed it by raising her from the dead. And in the same way it was not sensible for Jesus to tell His small group of disciples when faced with a crowd of well over 5,000 hungry people: “*You give them something to eat.*” *But Jesus did.* Perhaps the disciples were getting used to that by now, as part of their continuing education, for they don’t object – they simply take what they have and give it to Jesus. Five loaves of bread and two fish. And it is enough. For anything in the hands of the Lord is always enough. And more than enough.

Jesus then says grace, blessing God from whose hands come bread and fish. Then the bread passes from the hands of Jesus to the hands of the disciples, and from the hands of the disciples to the hands of the people. They now do as Jesus had told them, giving them all something to eat. And all not only eat – they have their fill. Jesus is lavish with His gifts. He does not carefully measure out to each an exact portion: 2 ounces of bread and 1 ounce of fish for each adult. *There you go, that’s enough, move along.* No. Jesus gives and gives and keeps on giving. More than we think. More than we expect. More than we imagine. For here in this man Jesus is our giving God in human flesh and bone. Here in this man Jesus is the One who has come in fulfillment of the words of the prophet Isaiah, *providing wine and milk*, or in this case, bread and fish, *without money and without price.* That all may come and be

filled.

And that “all” means not only the people in Isaiah’s day, or the over 5,000 gathered in the countryside around Jesus, but also you and me today. The feeding our Lord began then continues to this day as we have come to our Lord here in this place and receive His food. From the hands of His servants today, Jesus is still feeding multitudes – not with bread and fish, or mere bread and wine, but with His very own body and blood. He does not leave us to discover our own “spirituality,” or send us away in search of our own spiritual nourishment, but comes to provide for us. And not just a morsel, but to give an *abundance* of His forgiveness, life, and salvation. That we be filled with Him and His life.

That is Jesus, your Saviour. The One we just sang about: *the living bread from heaven who well feeds His guests.* (LSB 642)

But while we are guests, we are not only guests. For with Jesus, guests do not remain just guests. For when you get Jesus, it is as St. Paul told us today: *you get the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, the patriarchs, and the promises.* Those things given to the old Israel now also given to you, the new Israel, the new people of God, through faith in Christ. And all that has been given to you, when you were baptized into Christ. He does not withhold anything from you. He gives you all that He is and all that He has. He has made you His own. He has made you His Christian.

And so in the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000 today, we **not only** sit with the crowds and receive the gifts of Jesus, we also **stand** with Jesus, like the disciples, as givers. Now, there’s an important difference here, for not all are called by Jesus to be pastors, as Jesus was training those twelve disciples to be when He told them to feed the crowds. But you have been called by Jesus into the priesthood of the baptized. He has given you places to serve in all the vocations He has given you to live – in families, or as friends, workers, neighbors, and more. In those roles, you too stand with Jesus for those around you in this world, who have all kinds of needs. And as such, what has Jesus told *you* to do? Well, it is quite simple actually. Just as Jesus simply told His twelve: *They’re hungry? Well then, you give them something to eat!* So He tells us today: *They’re in need? Well then, you help them. Love them.* Love all people, no matter how good they are or no matter how much they get on your nerves! Love your neighbor and love your enemies. Do good to all people. Help, serve, pray for them. Be humble and consider others better than yourselves. And above all, forgive. No

matter what. With no strings attached.

Now, perhaps that list sounds about as non-sensible to you as Jesus telling His twelve to feed all those people! Perhaps you think: *I can't do those things. It is too much for me. Send them away to someone else to get what they need! All I have are these 10 miserable fingers, 2 stumbling feet, and 1 very black and sinful heart! What are these to do all that you have asked? . . .* **But Jesus does not live within the bounds of the sensible.** Like with the twelve, what you have, in the hands of Jesus, is enough. No matter who you are, your shortcomings and failures, your doubts and fears, your age, your health, your problems, or your past – in the hands of Jesus it matters not. What you are, what you have, is enough. No – it is *more* than enough.

Because the hands of Jesus that held those five loaves of bread and two fish and fed so many people, were the same hands that took the nails and wood of Calvary. The hands of your Saviour, who came to provide what you need the most: the restoration of your life with God in the forgiveness of your sin. And to provide this forgiveness and restoration for not just 5 thousand or 5 million or 5 billion people – *but each and every person. Every person* from Adam until the last little boy or girl conceived before Jesus comes again. *Every person*, including you and me. Jesus ascended the cross that the sins which separate us from God be on Him and not on us. That He receive the condemnation for them and not us. That He die and not us. That taking our sin and dying our death, we live His life. Our old man dying and a new man rising. For now risen from the dead, He lives to give us that life and those gifts He won for us. To continue His work, to feed and forgive and save.

For consider what those hands of Jesus have worked – and are still working – in you. For in Holy Baptism, the hands of Jesus have taken a person born dead in sin and raised you from the dead to a new life. In those waters His hands have made a saint out of a sinner, and a son out of a rebel.

In Holy Absolution, the hands of Jesus take a person who has again plunged back into the filth of the sin of this world, and washes you clean in forgiveness. A forgiveness that is not carefully and stingily measured out, but which is lavished upon you! With those words His hands pull you out of the pit of sin, rescue you, and restore you prodigals as sons.

And then again, as I mentioned earlier, in the hands of Jesus mere bread wafers and a cup of wine become His own life-giving body and blood, given to feed you with His

forgiveness, life, and salvation. A banquet that never runs out, but which is here for you as often as you need it; a feast that will not end with this life, but will continue even forever, in Heaven.

And so **in** the hands of Jesus, we become what we were not before. **From** the hands of Jesus, we receive all that we need, and more. And **under** the hands of Jesus, we live under His blessing and love. To be not all that *we* can be – but to be all that He has made us. To live as His own, loving and serving and forgiving as we are loved and served and forgiven. For as it was then, so it is now – there is always more Jesus than we think. More than we expect. More than we imagine. More Jesus given *to* us and also *through* us. From His hands to ours, and from ours to the world, for the life of the world.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

(Some thoughts for this sermon taken from Rev. Dr. Norman Nagel in *Selected Sermons of Norman Nagel*, p 192-193.)