

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Jesus says, “*where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them*” (Matt. 18:20). Using that saying in a light hearted way, and perhaps a bit self-deprecating, Presbyterians say, “where two or three Presbyterians gather together there will be at least four or five different points of view.” Funny. Baptists say much the same thing about themselves, or sometimes, “wherever two or three Baptists are gathered together, there's a schism.” You can find these on the internet. I didn't see anything like that for Roman Catholics, but there are statements like it for Lutherans: “where two or three Lutherans are gathered together, there will be a meal” or “food” or “a green bean casserole.” For Lutherans, it seems, faith and food go together.

That often seems to be Jesus' *modus operandi*, also, for that's what we have in the Gospel: an opportunity for faith and food. Reviewing the Gospel account, you recall that Jesus had sent out His disciples to various towns that they might preach and teach, extending Jesus' ministry. They returned exhausted, and Jesus invited them to “*a desolate place*” by themselves for rest. But it didn't work out that way. Somehow, the crowd figured out where they were going and ran ahead and got there first.

That's when Jesus took over. He recognized the peoples' need. He saw that “*they were like sheep without a shepherd.*” He had compassion on them, and He began His Divine Service to them. The Son of God began to teach them.

Now, I'm sure you recognized the little play on words there. Of course, when God's Son serves them, that makes the service Divine. But His service along with the prefatory call to repentance by the disciples provides the model for our worship, what we call the Divine Service.

Of course, we begin with our own time of preparation before the Divine Service proper, our time to be “heartily sorry” for our sins and “sincerely repent of them” (*LSB* Divine Service, Setting 3). And, we hear the absolution: for the sake of Jesus and by His grace, your sins are forgiven you.

But then comes the Divine Service proper, beginning with the Service of the Word. The Word of God is taught to us, beginning with the Introit, and we respond with more word right back — the Kyrie and the Gloria. Yes, our liturgy is filled with Holy Scripture! Next, we say a prayer, and then hear more of God's word, culminating in Jesus' own teaching in the Gospel lesson, which is the high point of this part of the Divine Service. Recognizing our need, our Good Shepherd speaks His own word to us His sheep. We hear His voice and follow Him with our faith strengthened.

The sermon is more of the same, generally expounding on Jesus' own words or deeds as the Good Shepherd's rod and staff to lead us in the paths of righteousness, and to comfort and restore our souls. But Jesus' Divine Service to the 5,000 and to us does not end with His teaching. It continues with food — food supplied by Jesus Himself.

Back to our text, the hour had become late, and the disciples told Jesus to send the people away so that they could buy food for themselves. Jesus rejected their suggestion. "*You give them something to eat,*" He said, knowing that He would be the one giving food in abundance. The disciples were dismayed — "*two hundred denarii worth of bread [to] give ... to them to eat?*" That's over half a year laborer's wages!

"Let not your hearts be troubled," Jesus may have thought. "*Go and see* what you can find," He told them, and they brought back five loaves and two fish. Thus the table was set for the second part of Jesus' Divine Service.

Jesus had the people recline in groups in the green pasture — in symposia. συμπόσια συμπόσια — an interesting double word construction in the Greek text that Dr. Voelz talks about in his commentary. BDAG says a symposium is but "a common meal," but Liddell Scott calls it "a drinking party," indeed, a drinking party filled with convivial discussion. This was no ordinary meal — what a table Jesus spread. Besides Jesus multiplying bread and fish, enough to satisfy the hungriest soul, the people surely had drink, an overflowing cup, if you will. This was no ordinary meal; it was a feast surely with lively discussion about what Jesus had just been teaching; this was a banquet with baskets full of leftovers!

This feasting of the 5,000 leads us into a conversation about the second part of Jesus' Divine Service to us here also — we call it the Service of the Sacrament where Jesus supplies us true food and true drink to feast on (John 6:55). Much like Jesus' disciples, we may supply the bread and wine, but Jesus does the miracle of joining His body and blood to these elements, that our hunger for forgiveness may be satisfied.

To be sure, God supplies us with our daily bread — "everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body," and that includes such things as "food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money, goods," and so forth (Small Catechism, Lord's Prayer, 4<sup>th</sup> Petition). So Jesus supplied the food for the 5,000. But Jesus is not just some "bread king," supplying people's needs for this life only. Rather, as we prayed in our Collect today, God through His Son provides "for all our needs of body AND SOUL" (Collect, Proper 11b).

Therefore, it's especially to the Sacrament that we come that Jesus may supply us with food for our souls, granting us salvation and comfort and life, both body and soul, for as Luther said, "where the soul has recovered, the body also is relieved" (Large Catechism, Sacrament of the Altar, 68). And we acknowledge that, besides daily bread, God is supplying these gifts, for which we "give thanks for all [the Lord's] benefits, and serve [Him] in willing obedience" (Collect).

This is what Cindy is acknowledging today — and Annie and Lewis reaffirming — and all of us with them; not only that the Evangelical Lutheran doctrine is right and pure, but also that this rhythm of the Christian life, of hearing the Word of God and receiving the Lord's Supper faithfully, is exactly what Jesus showed us, and that strengthened by these Divine things as a "foretaste of the feast to come" (*Lutheran Worship*, p. 169), they are going to live according to that Word of God in love and service to God and neighbor until Jesus comes again in glory to take them to the house of the Lord and to the unending feast there.

And ultimately, when the Church is gathered together there, it won't be that two or three will have four or five different views of things; there won't be any schism. But we will be one, all brought near by the blood of Christ, reconciled "*to God in one body through the cross,*" and there will be a banquet table with food. The Lutheran have it right. It will be a symposium of all symposia, "*a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. ... It will be said on that day, 'Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.'*"

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.