

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Jesus came with a purpose, namely, to serve us and to give His life as the redemption price for our sins. He came to save the world, Jew and Gentile, so that we might not perish eternally, but rather that, *“through the cross,”* He might *“reconcile us ... to God,”* bringing us into His church, which is His body, *“a holy temple,”* making us *“members of the household of God.”*

That’s a big task; indeed, it’s a God-sized task. You know you can’t even save yourself, let alone others. Surely no mere man can save the world. The disciples asked Jesus about this salvation: *“Who ... can be saved?”* And Jesus answered: *“With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible”* (Matt. 19:25-26). Therefore, if Jesus is the Savior of the world, as Scripture declares and we proclaim, He must be more than a mere man; He must be God.

But how should we come to know this? How could we know that He is God Himself in the flesh, the very Son of God?

Surely one way is for others to bear witness to it. The angel, for example. He bore witness to it at Jesus’ birth: He *“is Christ the Lord”* (Luke 2:11); that is, Jesus is God. Unclean spirits bore witness to it: *“I know who you are,”* they said of Jesus, *“the Holy One of God”* (Mark 1:24); and again later: *“You are the Son of God”* (3:11). God the Father Himself bore witness to it at Jesus’ baptism: *“You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased”* (Mark 1:11). And John the Baptist, who witnessed the marvelous sign of Jesus being anointed with the Holy Spirit at His baptism, bore witness to it: *“I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God”* (John 1:34).

Okay. That’s all well and good. But suppose the witnesses are wrong; maybe they misunderstand; or worse, maybe they’re deceiving us? How else might we come to know Jesus as not merely a man, but a man who is divine?

Another way might be that He shows Himself to be God by doing divine things, things that no mere mortal can do. We call them miracles. Peter called them *“mighty works and wonders and signs,”* and he proclaims to us that that’s exactly what Jesus did. Peter preached, this *“Jesus of Nazareth [was] a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst”* (Acts 2:22).

We have been hearing about some of these mighty works in the past weeks as we have been proceeding through the Gospel according to St. Mark. (Remember, the Gospel readings in the Series B set of lectionary readings come mainly from Mark.) So, the Evangelist Mark records how Jesus cast out unclean spirits. Jesus healed Peter’s mother-in-law and many others with all sorts of diseases. He

cleansed a leper. He healed a paralytic. He rebuked the wind and stilled the waves. He healed a woman with a chronic disease when she touched His garment. He raised a dead girl back to life. Who can do such things but God alone?

Yet, as wonderful as all those are, it turns out that they are not the signs that “seal the deal,” so to speak. Rather, the wonder that Jesus does in our Gospel lesson today is what He continues to point the disciples to for their understanding of who He is — the Evangelist Mark does it for us, too. He points to the miracle of the loaves.

Mark says of the disciples after they saw Jesus walking on the sea, but didn’t recognize Him: “*they did not understand about the loaves*” — not the miraculous healings, not His control of the elements, but the loaves. They should have understood from the loaves, “*but their hearts were hardened*” (Mark 6:52); they didn’t yet believe.

The next time Mark records how Jesus Himself would gently scold them. It was after another miracle with loaves, as He and the disciples were crossing the sea. The disciples were discussing their lack of adequate provisions. Perceiving it, Jesus asked them: “*Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up? They said to him, ‘Twelve.’ And the seven [loaves] for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up? And they said to him, ‘Seven.’ And he said to them, ‘Do you not yet understand?’*” (Mark 8:17-21). The miracles of the loaves should have been enough.

Truly, this miracle of the loaves was meant to instruct the disciples about Jesus’ person. Surely, He was a man, but the sign revealed His divinity — to them and to us — and even more. It revealed Jesus’ heart. It revealed Him as the fulfillment of God’s promises.

Here’s the account: Jesus and His disciples tried to get away to a quiet, deserted place for a little R & R, but the crowd would not let them. The crowd followed them — and Jesus had compassion on them. Of course, God is gracious and merciful apart from incarnation, but the incarnation allowed the Son of God to feel this compassion to the pit of His stomach. As the writer to the Hebrews said: “*we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses*” (Heb. 4:15). This crowd’s weakness was foremost in its leaders — “*shepherds who [were] destroy[ing] and scatter[ing] the sheep of [the LORD’s] pasture.*” And so, Jesus served them first by teaching them “*as one who had authority, and not as the scribes*” (Mark 1:22).

But it became late, and they were in a desolate place. Concerned for the people, the disciples wanted Jesus to send them into “*the surrounding countryside and villages,*” so that they might “*buy themselves something to eat.*” But now it was time for Jesus to teach the disciples (John 6:6). “*You give them something to eat,*” Jesus told them. “[*T*]wo hundred denarii worth of bread”? That’s way too expensive, they objected.

And so Jesus reveals a bit more of who He is. He reveals Himself to be a shepherd who would gather, and lead, and care for the sheep. As the shepherd of Psalm 23, the Lord Jesus would feed them until they were full — after this miraculous feeding they would not want for anything more.

Jesus made them lie down in green grass, reclining in groups as though they were going to a banquet, sumptuous in fare, overflowing in drink.

Jesus had sent the disciples about to find out what food they could muster. Perhaps it was theirs; perhaps the people shared it with them. They came back with five loaves and two fish. But what good would those scant provisions do for a crowd? The disciples would see.

With almost liturgical motions reminiscent of the Supper our Lord instituted, Jesus gave thanks, broke the bread, gave it to the disciples, and they distributed the bread and fish to the people. The people ate ... and ate ... and ate, until everyone was satisfied.

Then Jesus sent the disciples out with baskets to gather the leftovers ... and they gathered twelve baskets full of them — a mighty work of the Son of God. Five loaves and two fish multiplied in a display of the Lord’s bountiful goodness. These scant provisions fed a huge multitude with even more bounty. A sign and wonder done by Jesus, true God begotten of the Father and also true man born of the Virgin Mary.

The question for us today is: do we recognize Jesus for who He is by this miracle of the loaves. Do we recognize that Jesus provides us still with our daily bread? Indeed, He does it without our prayers; He even provides daily bread to evil people. God grant that He might lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread — that is everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body — with thanksgiving (Small Catechism, Lord’s Prayer, 4th Petition).

But even as Jesus taught the crowd, giving them the food that endures to eternal life (John 6:27), so Jesus seeks not simply to supply our 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).

Thus, it is to Jesus also that we turn for our greater need, the food for our soul, found in His Word and in His Sacrament. Luther says this of the Sacrament: that “where the soul has recovered, the body also is relieved” (Large Catechism, Sacrament of the Altar, 68). We’re thankful for God’s temporal gifts of daily bread, but especially for the eternal gifts of the soul we “give thanks for all [the Lord’s] benefits, and [seek to] serve [Him] in willing obedience” (Collect).

Finally, as we think on both this glorious miracle of the loaves and the miracle of Christ’s body and blood in the Sacrament, may we recognize that both miracles point ahead to what is to come. They are a “foretaste of the feast to come” (*Lutheran Worship*, p. 169) — the feast of eternal salvation. Indeed, may we eagerly await the day when Jesus comes again in glory to take us to Himself, where we will dwell in His house forever, where we will eat at His banquet of “*rich food [and] well-aged wine*” (Isa. 25:6) — where we will lie down in green pastures around our Shepherd and will never want forever.

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