

In the name of ✠ Jesus. Amen.

Today we encounter Jesus as a caretaker both of our bodies and our souls. It makes sense. It's how God made us, with both a body and a soul, the body formed from the dust of the ground, the breath of life breathed into Adam—a living soul. It's how we shall be raised up on the last day: sleeping bodies, surely turned to dust, awakened from the dead when the last trumpet sounds, souls that had been resting with Jesus returned to those bodies, caught up in the air to meet Jesus as He returns, our triumphant king.

Jesus is a caretaker, sent by the Father as an expression of His Divine love for creatures that do not deserve His goodness, as we prayed in the collect earlier. Not only that, but this Gospel text puts to rest the popular and unbiblical notion that *“God helps those who help themselves.”* The disciples were not all that good at taking care of themselves. Having returned from their little mission trip, they needed rest. Jesus took care of them. He took them away to a desolate place by themselves to *“rest a while.”*

The people, too, that followed Jesus to that desolate place, did so without any thought of planning, not to help themselves, nor even that Jesus would take care of them. They were *“like sheep without a shepherd,”* and that is not a compliment. So that when the hour became late, they were still there and had no food.

“Still You provide for all our needs of body and soul,” we prayed earlier. And though, we are praying it as Christians, yet we know that our God extends His providence not just to Christians, but to all. As Jesus reminds us, *“he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”*

Luther reminds us similarly as we ask the Lord for our daily bread, *“God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people”* And Luther thinks of this petition exclusively in terms of the needs of the body. That's how he answers the question, *“What is meant by daily bread,”* right? He answers, *“Daily bread includes everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body.”* And he explains further, giving a list, *“such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money, goods, a devout husband or wife, devout children, devout workers, devout and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, self-control, good reputation, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like.”*

We certainly see Jesus caring for the bodily needs of the people in our Gospel today. He had compassion on them. He fed them—5000 men, not counting women and children—in a miraculous multiplication of bread and fish. He took five loaves of bread and two small fish, and blessed them, and through His disciples distributed them to the people. And they ate until they were satisfied. He opened

His hand. The people received from His bountiful goodness. He satisfied the desire of their stomachs.

When it comes to the daily bread for our bodies, we should probably admit, we're not so good at supplying it on our own either. None of us is self-sufficient. We depend on those whom God has put in our lives to supply us with all that we need in this body and life: the farmer, the teamster, the grocer, doctors and nurses, police and firemen, teachers and leaders, and much more. These, like the disciples, work as God's agents to distribute our daily bread to us.

And though the evil and the unjust may not acknowledge who the giver is, we pray, as we did today, *"grant us Your Holy Spirit that we may acknowledge Your gifts, give thanks for all Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience."* Or as Luther explains, when we pray, *"Give us this day our daily bread,"* we're asking *"that God would lead us to realize [that He is the giver] and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving."*

But Jesus, in His *"desolate place"* temptation, also taught us, *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."* And the fact is, when Jesus saw the crowds and had compassion on them, the first thing He did was to care for their souls. That is, the first thing Jesus did was to teach them—to preach to them as He had earlier sent out His disciples to do—preaching repentance and healing their sick. Jesus is a caretaker of both body and soul.

What does that mean when it comes to the prayer Jesus taught us, and the petition *"Give us this day our daily bread?"* Luther taught that it refers only to bodily needs; could it be that we are praying for the needs of the soul also? Our own David Scaer teaches so, and I think he's right. Surely this central petition of the Lord's Prayer, surrounded by prayers for the kingdom and God's will to be done on earth and in heaven on the one side, and for forgiveness and deliverance from temptation and the evil one on the other side, is not focused only on the body, but also on the soul. Not one to the exclusion of the other. I'm not saying (nor does Scaer) it's either the body or the soul, but it's both body and soul, again as we prayed today, *"You provide for all our needs of body and soul,"* for *"man shall not live by bread alone."*

So then, we can add another vocation to the lists we made before. We can add pastor, that is, shepherd, to do like the Good Shepherd and have compassion on the flock, to teach and preach in a way that the sheep hear the voice of Jesus, the Righteous Branch, their wise, just and righteous king, and follow after Him. The Holy Spirit working through the church calls, ordains, and installs *"overseers,"* that is, pastors, as caretakers of *"the flock"* which Jesus redeemed by His blood. They are to hold Him, who laid down His life for the sheep, before their eyes. They are to use rod and staff to ward off the *"fierce wolves [that] will come in among*

you, not sparing the flock; [men who will speak] twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.”

Your pastors won't do it perfectly. Lord have mercy on them. But they are called to be faithful stewards. And you? You are called to test everything your pastors say, keeping your eyes fixed on Jesus, listening for His voice. Pastors are to preach as Jesus did and as He commanded: repentance and forgiveness of sins in His name—that your souls may be restored, that with Judah you may be saved, and with Israel you may dwell securely, that you may call on the name of the Jesus, that you may bend the knee to Him and confess Jesus as Lord, your righteousness.

Pastors are not sent to scatter, but to lead the sheep to the quiet waters of Holy Baptism, waters that gather God's people together. Pastors are to have the sheep lie down in green pastures that they may find their rest in Jesus. Pastors are called to lead the people to the table the Lord has prepared for them and to bid them drink from His overflowing cup. Of course, this language points us to the Supper Jesus gave for us to eat and drink *“for the forgiveness of our sins.”* And as we eat, we are blessed body and soul: *“The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen and preserve you in body and soul to life everlasting.”*

Finally, as we consider Jesus today as a caretaker of body and soul and as He gives us callings as disciples to participate in this same work, let us not see our work as disciples exclusively in one area or the other either. It's not the sole domain of pastors to be Seelsorger, a caretaker of the soul, while laymen are caretakers of the body. To be sure, pastors are given a stewardship of the mysteries of God, and are to preach and administer the Sacraments. But as disciples, you are called in your own station, growing and driving and curing and caring, and administrating, etc. Nevertheless, we are all called to care for one another, body and soul, with our prayers, with our acts of love toward one another, and with *“the mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren.”*

God grant us faithfulness in all our callings, that others may see the work done in the Lord's name, that they too *“may acknowledge [His] gifts, give thanks for all [His] benefits, and [with us] serve [Him] in willing obedience.”*

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