

In the name of ✠ Jesus. Amen.

Today we encounter Jesus as a caretaker of both body and soul. 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 important to confess it. Even in death, we do not treat the body as “an empty shell,” refuse, something to be discarded, but as that which will be raised up on the last day. On that day, our sleeping bodies, surely turned to dust, nothing but dry bones, will awaken from the dead when the last trumpet sounds, rattling bones coming together with sinews and flesh and skin. And the souls that had been resting with Jesus will return to these bodies, so that, body and soul, they might be caught up in the air to meet Jesus, our triumphant king, as He returns.

Thus, there is also a Christian concern for both body and soul: our own and others. Not that we're always that good at caring for ourselves. The disciples weren't. Having returned from their little mission trip, they needed rest. So 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, neither to help themselves, nor even that Jesus would take care of them. Yet, He did it, even without their prayers. He did it even though as wandering sheep they didn't deserve His kindness. He had compassion on them, because they were “*like sheep without a shepherd.*” So that when the hour became late, and they were still there and had no food, Jesus came to their bodily aid.

It's little different for us. We acknowledged in the collect today that “we do not deserve [God's] goodness, still [He] provide[s] for all our needs of body and soul.” That is, God takes care of us, but He does not act because we deserve it. Whether it's the care for our bodies, the provisions for our body and life, or our defense and protection, “all this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me,” we confess with Luther.

More than that, God's providence extends not just to believers, but also to unbelievers. Thus 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*” (Matt. 5:45). And Luther reminds us similarly as we ask the Lord for our daily bread, that “*God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people*”

Of course, Jesus took care of the bodily needs of the people in our Gospel lesson today in an extraordinary way. He did a miracle. Five loaves and two fish were found among the people, and Jesus took them, blessed them, and gave them to the disciples to distribute. The people ate until they were satisfied, and there

were twelve baskets full of food left over. He opened His hand. The people received from His bountiful goodness. He satisfied the desire of their stomachs.

Jesus is still at it today, taking care of our physical needs, albeit in a much more ordinary way: through the farmer, the teamster, the baker, the grocer, through doctors and nurses, police and firemen, teachers and leaders, and much more. For our own provision, again we confess, “it is our duty to thank and praise, serve and obey” God. This, too, takes a bit of assistance, and so we prayed earlier, “grant us Your Holy Spirit that we may acknowledge Your gifts, give thanks for all Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience.” Indeed, when we pray, “Give us this day our daily bread,” Luther reminds us that we’re asking “that God would lead us to realize [that He is the giver] and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.”

But remember I said that Jesus is caretaker of both body and soul. Indeed, Jesus, in His own “desolate place” temptation, taught us, “*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God*” (Matt. 4:4). And when Jesus saw the crowds in this desolate place and had compassion on them, that’s how He cared for them first. He cared for their souls, that is, He taught them—He preached to them of the arrival of the kingdom of God; He called them to repentance; He called them to faith.

Jesus is still at this, too, taking care of our spiritual needs — our souls — and, yes, now in an ordinary way. As He does with the body, working through farmers, grocers, etc., to feed us the food that sustains our bodies, so He does with the soul, working through pastors to show Christ’s compassion to the flock and to feed us the food we need for our souls, the word that comes from the mouth of God, a word promised of old, fulfilled in Jesus. “*A righteous Branch,*” wise and just and righteous, was raised up out of David, to sit on the throne and rule in a kingdom that has no end. And in Him alone you will find salvation and security, in Him who is called “*the Lord our Righteousness.*”

Again, listen to the word that comes from the mouth of God, “*you who once were far off,*” “*separated from Christ,*” you “*have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*” The Prince of Peace established peace with God for you, reconciling you to God “*through the cross.*” You’re no longer “*strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.*” You’re “*a holy temple in the Lord,*” “*a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*”

That’s why Jesus instituted the Office of the Holy Ministry as you heard if you were there last Sunday at Scott Nagy’s ordination. That’s why 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 speak as undershepherds of the Good Shepherd; they are to speak His words as His own voice;

they are to hold Him, who laid down His life for the sheep, before the eyes and ears of the flock that they might follow Him. 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”* (Acts 20:28-30).

Last Sunday’s ordination was also a poignant reminder of the awesome responsibilities of the pastoral office, how much is expected, and how often I fail. Lord have mercy on me. I covet your prayers, your encouragement, your aid. I need them, and I need your discerning ears that listen carefully for Jesus’ word proclaimed in its truth and purity, that you may truly be His disciples, that you may know the truth that sets you free.

And I covet your partnership in the Gospel. Pastors are not pastors without a flock. The church, pastors and flock, are built on Jesus Christ, the Cornerstone, and upon the apostolic doctrine that bears witness to Him. To be sure, pastors are given a stewardship of the mysteries of God. Pastors publicly preach and administer the Sacraments. But all disciples have callings — duties — within the station God has given them. God grant that you may fulfill your Christian duties as you seek to follow the example of Jesus, our caretaker in both body and soul. The Lord strengthen you in your callings by the Supper you’re about to receive — strengthen and preserve you in body and soul with His body and blood — strengthen you in faith toward Him and in your fervent love toward one another.

And God grant us all 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.