

“Faith is Necessary...”

St. Mark 8:8

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SERMON 1926

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Our sermon text is from Mark 8:8, “So they ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets of leftover fragments.”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

With the first chapter of the book of Genesis, we see that our Triune God has made provisions for a secular kingdom in order to provide for our physical life here on earth. He has formed a terrestrial kingdom in which all of the necessities of the body are sustained by means of the materials and skills He has provided.

Our God provided for the alteration of light and darkness, that we might have night and day. He provided for the yearly alternation of seasons over the course of a year. He provided plants and vegetation included the rain and ground to sustain them. He used the green bearing plants to provide for the animals on the land, the fish in the sea, and the birds in the air. When everything was ready, God made man in His own image and placed his most special creation in the midst of it.

With his natural knowledge and God-created reason, man is able to live in the garden and provide for himself. He is able to sleep and eat and work and play. Adam and Eve are made so that they are able to procreate. First, they take care of their children, and then later in life their children take care of them. It is a wonderful creation in which nothing is lacking.

Even after the fall into sin, natural--and now sinful--man is still able to sustain life solely by means of His human reason and God-given skills. He can adapt to changes and catastrophes. He can increase his production and maintain the life he has been given.

We see in Genesis chapter two from today’s Old Testament reading that God knew that we were not a physical body only, but a body and a soul. Therefore, God also saw fit to provide for our spiritual welfare. He created a tree of life so that through faith in God’s Word, they could regularly eat of this tree of life. It was their sacrament in which God had connected his promise. As a good heavenly Father, He warned his children not to partake of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, lest they die.

In His foreknowledge, our Creator God knew the tragic path that His children would take and so He also made plans to save them by the fruit of a second tree. At just the right time, our Savior would come as the offspring of the woman. He would live a perfect life to earn our entrance into eternal life. He would suffer and die to pay the enormous debt which we had accumulated for our sin and disobedience. Through the wood of the cross, our Jesus would turn the curse of sin into a life-giving tree. Through faith in His words of promise, we would come to eat and drink at His sacrament. Through eating and drinking Christ’s Body and Blood, we have the food which gives us

forgiveness of sin and eternal life. Our Savior provided the atonement which we needed for our spiritual welfare. Through the preaching of the Word we receive forgiveness and a spiritual kingdom, eternal life.

In today's Holy Gospel we see that despite God's provisions for our body and soul, things can get messed up. The multitudes have come out into the wilderness to hear Jesus' preaching. It is a noble and God-pleasing thing which they have done. Furthermore, they have stayed not just one or two days, but three days because of their love of God's Word. So how could it be that they are without food and no place to secure it?

We, too, will find that as we hold to God's Word, there are situations to try our hearts and minds. **First of all**, we are not exempt from the natural laws of God's creation. Christians don't get a pass from the daily chores and necessities of this world. Yes, we believe that salvation is a free gift, but this world still works on the principle: If a man won't work, he shall not eat. Christians need to work hard to make an income. Christians have to do the hard work of raising children and providing for parents. Christians get sick and infected just as others do. The homes of Christians burn down. Their basements flood and their cars get totaled.

Second, Christ's believers are persecuted by the sinful world. Like the devil these unbelievers, who are children of the devil, are liars and murderers. It wasn't long before unbelieving Cain killed Abel, who trusted in God for His salvation. There are those who seek to force believers to give up their beliefs. They harm or at least threaten believers with harm unless they bow the knee to the world's god and its teachings. They cannot leave us alone. They hide their agenda by their lies. They seek to force us to celebrate their immoral lifestyle and bless their ungodly unions. They are offended by our devotion to our spouse and our refusal to join in their detestable practices.

In today's Epistle, St. Paul tries a different approach to explaining the difference between the life of the believer and the life of the unbeliever. Yes, of course, we are to turn away from lawlessness and live righteous life out of thankfulness for the free gift of salvation. But here, St. Paul uses the simple natural law of cause and effect in order to explain the natural result of the unbeliever's actions in contrast to the believer's actions. St. Paul says, "I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh." In other words, you are sinners, so I'm going to explain it in a way that even an unbeliever can understand.

When you live a life that is against the God's law, you will receive harm and death.

--If you are sexually permissive and seek to misuse those pleasures intended for the institution of marriage, you will receive the degradation of your body. You will be open to sexual diseases and will short-circuit the loving relationship upon which the life-long union of marriage is based.

--If you harbor hate and seek opportunities to harm those you despise, it will harm you. The one who lives by the sword, will die by the sword. A life of hate and selfishness will create loneliness and distrust.

--If you covet your neighbor's possessions and seek to get their goods by dishonest ways, you will never enjoy your ill-gotten gains, or be satisfied with your stolen loot.

--If you lie and gossip about your neighbor, you will soon be without neighbors. If you cannot control your tongue, who will wish to confide in you and speak with you.

St. Paul is not making some spiritually difficult point. He is simply stating the law of natural retribution. "What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed?" You did evil, how did that work out for you? Did you really get ahead? **Furthermore, there is shame in sin!** I know there are those who do their best to try and remove the shame, but it is still there. Those who live this way protest too loudly. They are not content to simply live an immoral life, they must force us to accept and bless them. And like Cain toward Abel, they will keep it up until we give in or they remove us. The problem for them is that even then, the shame will not go away. When unrepentant Cain goes away, but he is irrationally scared that someone will kill him. Due to his sinful shame, he assumes that everyone else hates him and seeks to harm just as he has done to his brother.

The lesson for us today is equally easy to understand. **First, those who are living as believers will receive everlasting life.** Now don't misunderstand, I'm not saying that we earn eternal life. Eternal life is a free gift of God. Through faith we receive the blessings of the atonement purchased by our Lord Jesus Christ. But once we have come to faith, our Triune God has given us a new heart so that we desire to serve Him freely and joyfully.

St. Paul says, "But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Your sin is forgiven; so that you now have a new master. In human terms, you have become a slave or servant to God.

--Before this you served Satan. And he gave you the "freedom" to indulge in your sinful passions of hate, lust, and lawlessness. You lived in fear of punishment and shame of your actions.

--But now, as a Christian, you offer your body to pursue righteousness. You give yourself to your spouse. You serve your children and parents. You speak truthfully. You have received contentment along with the gifts God has given you. You receive a clear conscience so that you can live without shame or guilt. If you do wrong, you confess it. If you are wronged, you forgive and leave it all to God.

Second, today's Holy Gospel teaches us that faith is necessary for the believer to live a life without worry in the face of the temptation to doubt God's provisions in this life. God has given His believers a promise that He will provide for both soul and body.

Look at the reaction of our Savior to those who came to hear the Word of God. Pay careful attention to our Savior's emotions when He sees the condition of those who have clung to their Savior's words for three days. Jesus says, "I have compassion on the multitude...." Our God loves His believers and will not allow them to be harmed in this world. The Creator of this present world, can turn one loaf into as many as He desires. We know that our Lord didn't come to earth to make bread and open a bakery. Nevertheless, when his believers are in need, the Lord will direct all things to provide for

them. With faith in Christ, we can commit into God's hand our body and soul. All the while we direct our attention in seeking to be faithful to His Word. Do not worry about your bodily life, be faithful in your vocation and with the gifts He has given.

More than that, God will provide not only for the individual believer but also for the maintenance of His church. Despite the unbelieving Cains in this world, who manage to kill a few of us believing Abels, the Lord will provide for His church. They cannot harm us, for we have the Lord on our side. We know the result or rather the fruit which we will receive now that we have been set free from sin. Our end is eternal life.