



ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

The Seventh Sunday in Trinity
July 15, 2018

✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son and of The Holy Ghost. Amen.

The passage selected for the Sermon today is taken from the Gospel:

“I have compassion on the multitude, for they have been with me three days, and if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way” St. Mark 8:2-4

In this passage, Jesus turns to his disciples and asks them to prepare to feed His sheep, AGAIN. These are the same disciples that have been with Jesus throughout His Ministry. They have confessed Him as the Messiah, they have even seen Him perform this exact same miracle before, with the loaves and the fishes, and yet they turn and helplessly ask, “From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?”

When Jesus looked out on this crowd, and determined to minister to faintness, He was looking beyond the hungry bellies into the faint heartedness of his disciples, including our own generation. He knew we would not be sustained in the wilderness without His grace to fortify us. The bread that He broke for the multitude was the symbolic precursor of the Bread that He breaks for us, as we follow Him into the wilderness, with our own shaky faith.

The wilderness is an important theme in the history of salvation. Abraham was called to leave his old life and journeyed through the wilderness to start a new life in covenant with God. His willingness to go, his faith, was counted to him as righteousness. Moses led the Jews from Egypt through the wilderness to begin the new life of Israel under the covenant. Jesus even goes to the wilderness himself, to confront the devil, before he begins his public ministry and is tempted to turn rocks into bread to feed Himself. And in this passage, Jesus turns for the

second time to the multitude which has followed him into the wilderness. He pities them, and worries about their ability to journey home without fainting and falling by the way.

It is obvious that this image of wilderness is a critical image in our own spiritual journey. Physically, the wilderness of the Holy Land is like high desert. Those of you that have visited New Mexico or Eastern California know the terrain. It is not the desert of cattle skulls and cactus. Instead it is sage brush and Joshua trees, broken rock and craggy hills. The air is hot, and dry, and thin. It is a land of scorpions and snakes. It is a land empty of earthly lushness, a moonscape, a place of otherworldliness. It is a place of challenge, and metaphorically, it is the place of Spiritual challenge, the dominion of the devil.

How can we, who live in lush, green, tropical Baltimore County relate to this wilderness. We relate because we too live in personal emotional and spiritual deserts. The desert of our lives is the Spiritual desert that we create by our unwillingness to confess our own sins and forgive those who sin against us. Our private landscape is stripped of beauty and abundance by our selfishness. The air of our private desert is heated by the anger of grudges we won't let go. The poisonous beasts of our private desert are the hurtful words that spring and sting so easily from our mouths. We are journeying through this private desert toward a better place, a place Jesus has prepared for us. He has looked on us, and pitied us, because he knows we won't survive as we follow Him through this place without some special grace. He intervenes to overcome our environment and our nature by nourishing us with Bread from Heaven.

This particular trip to the desert hearkens back to the journeys of Abraham and Moses. It is a call to, and

preparation for, the New Covenant. It is no accident that the crowd has been on his heels for three days. Three days. When we reflect for just a moment, the significance of the three days strikes us. This particular three-day trek looks forward to that three day journey into the dominion of the devil, the desert of death, that will happen from Good Friday to Easter. The faintness Jesus anticipates of this crowd is also the faint heartedness He knows the disciples will exhibit on the trek from His Crucifixion to His Resurrection. It is the faintness of heart He knows we feel when we try to pierce the veil and look beyond the sickness and death that surround us as we traverse our personal spiritual wilderness.

In baptism we are born to life. We put away the wage of our sin, which is death. By faith in His Gospel. we journey through the wilderness toward our Home with Jesus, and yet, despite our faith, we faint at heart as we confront the illusion of death that rules in the dominion of the serpent.

From the Cross, that three-day journey looked bleak. From our sickbeds and gravesides, the journey still fills us with dread. How do we find nourishment, fulfillment, and even life itself, in that fearsome desert that seemed to swallow even the source of Life? The answer is through Jesus. He takes His very Body and Blood, and makes them Bread for us, to nourish us in our journey. What in human eyes seemed inadequate and doomed in the face of the Cross on Calvary, is mystically transformed, Resurrected, and given to us, and every generation, to feed us in our need, though the mystery of it overflows the boundaries of our understanding.

This miracle is recorded to teach us the essential nature of Eucharistic grace for our survival as we make this spiritual journey. This multitude that followed Jesus into the desert were baptized in Spirit to the new Life.

They had heard the very word of God from lips of Jesus for the last three days. They had received the teaching in their hearts. They knew Jesus loved them for their faith to journey in the wilderness. But even sharing their walk through the wilderness with Jesus would not be enough to sustain the disciples when they left His presence.

That multitude would have fainted physically. His disciples, his Apostles, even Peter who confessed Him as the Messiah, would also faint at heart on Good Friday. Those of us that he sees in the disciples' eyes, the Christians of today, of this place, and in this building; though we are baptized and filled with His Word, *will* also faint on our journey through this life and death unless we are fed with the Bread of Heaven, which is His very Body. There is no doubt that the Bread of the wilderness is bread of covenant. In the same words that He uses in the consecration, he tells us that it is. He takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to us in mystical abundance, filling all who eat, and then overflowing the world with life from what seemed to be merely bread before its transformation.

There are three things necessary to our Salvation. We have to hear the Word of God and choose to die to the world of death that we have earned by our sinful wages. We have to be re-born through Baptism into the Life that was wage of Calvary. And we have to be nourished, by the Eucharist, as we contend with the wilderness so that we don't faint before we can get home to Jesus.

We will be offered this very Bread of Heaven in just a few minutes. Receive this Bread we are about to be offered to sustain our hearts by faith in our journey through the wilderness, and be thankful for His grace.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen