

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Exodus 24:3-11; John 6:1-15

What a meal!

Talk about a meal. Israel is gathered at the terrifying mountain of the Law, Mt. Sinai, to be confirmed in a covenant with the most holy and just LORD God. There are no trifles this day. Everything is done with a purpose, to convey the solemnity of this covenant.

There's blood—lots of blood, loads of blood. Moses takes the blood of the sacrifices of the young men of Israel and does something strange. He puts half in basins, and throws half against the altar. And then, and only then, he reads the Book of the Covenant. When the people respond with agreement, Moses takes the other blood and throws it—not sprinkles, but throws it—as hard as he can on the people. Bloody altar, bloody hands, bloody heads, bloody feet, bloody faces. Blood everywhere. And Moses says something very important. *“The blood of the covenant.”* Remember that. It's important.

And then the leaders of Israel go up to eat, trembling with fear. This was the thunderous and holy mountain of the LORD, from which His soul shaking voice had crashed down upon them in the past like a tsunami. Now they are invited up for a meal, and a meal is what they get. They eat and drink in the LORD's presence, and most amazingly of all, they live. What a meal!

Talk about a meal. The disciples are in the middle of nowhere with Jesus and five thousand men, not counting women and children, who didn't fight in armies and, thus, aren't part of the census. Tired, sunburned, hungry, Jesus turns and says to them, *“Where are you going to buy bread for them?”* He doesn't say, “How?” No, He says, *“Where.”* It's a given that the disciples are going to feed the people, at least from Jesus' perspective. The question is from where they will get the food.

“They eyes of all look to You, and You give them their food in due season. You open Your hand; You satisfy the desire of every living thing” (Psalm 145:15-16). Luther commends these verses of Psalm 145 to us in the Small Catechism as a prayer to say grace. Philip would've done well to remember them as well. Instead, however, he does the math, and, to be fair, which of us wouldn't have without hindsight. *“Two hundred denarii,”* eight months wages, *“wouldn't be enough for them all to even get a little bite”* he insists. Judas' hands must've clench around the disciples' money purse. But the Lord already knows what He is going to do. He just wants the disciples learn that the answer to most of life's questions is, “from Jesus' hands.”

Everyone got food from Jesus' hands that day. During the Passover, Jesus took bread, gave thanks, and gave it to His disciples. Jesus placed this miraculous food into the hands of His disciples who, in turn, placed it into the hands of those gathered. What a miracle! A real miracle! Many have tried to explain it away, but no, this is a miracle.

Everyone there ate with the Lord and lived. No, this wasn't the thunderingly frightening and glorious God of the Law on Sinai—it was the incarnate and unassuming God of the cross on a mountain on the other side of the Sea of Galilee—but it was the same God, now preparing a new covenant. The people ate. And they ate. And they ate until it was all gone. Well, except for twelve basketfuls, that is. Twelve basketfuls! When the LORD feeds His people, He feeds His people.

The Psalmist says, *“He satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul He fills with good things”* (107:9). Forget the soul, though. The crowd's belly was full, and that was all they wanted. They were ready to crown Him king, but not with a crown of thorns, as Jesus knew His crown must be. They wanted a Bread-King, to keep two chickens in every pot and a car in every garage. They wanted a new GM, a new Delphi. They wanted to be full. Bread-Kings have always been more popular than crucified Savior-Kings, and so Jesus withdrew, because He knew He had a cross waiting and blood to shed.

Yet how often don't we just want that Bread-King as well? How often don't we pray more fervently in physical need than spiritual need? How often doesn't hardship leave a bad taste in our mouth rather than making the bread the Lord does provide taste sweeter? How often don't we spend more time doubting that our God will give us this day our daily bread—as He has promised!—than thanking Him for giving us His only-Begotten Bread from heaven? How richly hasn't He fed us already, so that we have several garbage baskets in our house to empty weekly, if not daily, of what's been wasted? How often don't we move from the lesser to the greater, from the belly to the soul, instead of from the soul to the belly, encouraging ourselves with the sure and certain knowledge that He who feeds our faith with His own flesh will feed our flesh as well, maybe not with Panera bread, but with daily bread?

“O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endures forever.” And merciful He is. He does not withdraw from us, as He did from the crowd, to continue on the path to His cross, but instead loving leads us on the path to His empty tomb that we might know what life is and know it to the fullest—life given for us on the cross and given to us in another meal, a miraculous meal.

God is not bound by time, but He operates within it, and there are few coincidences when He does. Just as He chose His words carefully in Scripture, He chose times and places with purpose as well. Moses takes bowls full of blood and gives them to the people, declaring, *“The blood of the covenant.”* Jesus takes wine, gives thanks, and gives it to His disciples, saying *“My Blood of the Covenant.”* During the Passover, Jesus takes a few loaves and feeds the people gathered so richly that basketfuls remain. During the Passover, Jesus takes bread, gives thanks, and gives it to His disciples, feeding them with a Meal so abundant that no baskets could hold it. You don't have to be a brain surgeon or rocket scientist. *“These are a shadow of things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ,”* God says through St. Paul (Colossians 2:17). Everything, Old Testament and New Testament, revolves around Christ's passion, and that is true of these events as well.

On the Passover, during the week of His passion, on the night on which He was betrayed, Jesus took bread, broke it, gave thanks, and gave it to His disciples. Then He took wine, in a chalice, and said, *“This is My Blood of the covenant.”* Same words as Moses, with just one addition. *“My Blood of the covenant.”* *“My Blood.”* Those words must have filled Him with fear and joy at the same time. *“Now drink it.”* Just as the peace offering from our first lesson was eaten in a communal meal, the sacrifice of the new covenant was to be eaten as well. And in this meal the King is recognized and the Prophet is seen as He would have us see Him: not as a Bread-King, but as the crucified and risen Savior-King who, together with daily bread, gives us His flesh to eat for our salvation.

What a meal! You have eaten and drunk with God, with the LORD God, and lived. You have eaten and drunk the mercy-laden flesh and blood of God and lived. *“My Blood of the covenant”*—a miraculous meal that has fed more thousands than five! If Jesus has so fed you in the Sacrament, if He has so loved you in setting His face on the cross when the devil and the world had already offered Him a crown of jewels and not thorns, that you might live and feast even though you die, how can you doubt He will give you your daily bread? Times might be tough. Sometimes the math might not add up, as it didn't for Philip. Sometimes your hands might tighten around a purse with less than it seems you need to provide. But you need not worry. That is what Jesus taught Philip, after all, and that is what He teaches us. *“They eyes of all look to You, and You give them their food in due season. You open Your hand; You satisfy the desire of every living thing”* (Psalm 145:15-16). *“O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endures forever.”* Amen.