

Pentecost 10
July 29, 2018

2 Kings 4:42-44
256-421-484-260

God Takes Care of His People

- I. We gratefully acknowledge this with our offerings.
- II. We confidently trust God to do this.

Dear Christian friends,

Jesus feeding the 5,000 is one of the few miracles recorded in all four gospels. It's interesting to compare the different accounts. It's John who tells us that it was already at the START of the day that Jesus asked the disciples, "How are we going to feed all these people?" John also tells us that ***"(Jesus) asked this only to test them, for He already had in mind what He was going to do."*** Later that day when the ONLY ANSWER the disciples had was to ***"send them away"*** Jesus quickly shot that down with a ***"they don't need to go away. YOU give them something to eat."*** This miracle is meant to teach us that WE NEED **God's help** and that God is right there to help us.

It's easy to see the connection between the gospel reading and this one. **Both** are God miraculously providing for His people. Both teach that GOD TAKES CARE OF HIS PEOPLE. Looking closer at these verses we learn that yes – **God takes care of His people** – 1) we gratefully acknowledge that with our offerings and 2) we confidently trust God to do that.

I. We gratefully acknowledge that with our offerings.

God takes care of His people. That's TRUE – but it doesn't always look like that. Back in Elisha's day a **seven-year famine** was taking its toll on the people. That famine wasn't caused by **global warming** or an **"El Nino."** God had sent it to **punish** His impenitent, stubborn people. The vast majority of the Israelites had turned their backs on God and were instead worshiping the idol Baal. Baal was supposed to guarantee you **bountiful harvests** and **prosperity**. With that seven-year famine God tried to show His people HOW WORTHLESS Baal really was. People can be SO FICKLE. When times are good it's "Who NEEDS God?" – but when times are tough they get all TICKED OFF at God – "WHAT GOOD is God?"

Elisha worked in the **northern kingdom** of Israel. Idolatry had **pretty well taken over** among God's people but there were still the FAITHFUL FEW. We have an example here. He's UNKNOWN by name to us but He is known to God. Like so many of God's people he's a NOBODY to the **world** but he was dearly loved by his Lord and dearly in love with his Lord. **He's a man whose actions** SPEAKER LOUDER than just words. It's easy enough to SAY we **love** God – **trust** God – we're grateful to God. This man's actions showed that. ***"A man came from Baal Shalishah and brought (Elisha) some bread from the first ripe grain, twenty loaves of barley bread, and some new grain in his sack."*** EVEN IN those tough times God had TAKEN CARE of this man and he gratefully acknowledged that with **his offering**.

Under **OT ceremonial law** the Jews were required to bring God the **"firstfruits"** – the VERY FIRST part of the **crop harvested**. The opposite of the **"firstfruits"** is the LASTfruits – the leftovers. BEFORE the Israelites used any of the crop to feed themselves or sold any of it to **make some money** – BEFORE any of that they were to bring God their **"firstfruits."** Those firstfruits usually brought the BEST PRICES. People can't wait for the FIRST **sweet corn** – the first **tomatoes**. They'll pay a GOOD PRICE for them. But later on – when they've had their fill of whatever – it **can be hard to give away** your LEFTOVER corn or tomatoes or zucchini.

With the firstfruits the Israelites were to give God their BEST. It was to be we FIRST GIVE to God **and** then we live off what's LEFT. **How often** don't people reverse that – we take care of OURSELVES FIRST and give God what's left after that. How do YOU DECIDE **how much** to put in your offering? Is it after paying off all your bills, etc., - THIS is what I can AFFORD to give God? That's not gratitude

– that’s SELFISHNESS. If money is tight – is the FIRST THING **you cut** your offering – or do you cut **other things** first?

God takes care of His people and we gratefully acknowledge that with **generous** offerings. Our offerings are NOT SIMPLY or even mainly about paying the church’s bills – WLA’s bills – the synod’s bills. AT THE HEART of our offerings is to be our gratitude for **God’s goodness**.

God DOES take care of His people. Our readings make clear that GOES FOR BOTH our **physical** and **spiritual** needs. Let’s NOT WAIT until Thanksgiving to count our blessings and **be thankful**. Oh, we may have had to TIGHTEN our belts and cut back on some things – we may have had to do EVEN MORE **penny-pinching** – but we still live a life that’s UNBELIEVABLY GOOD to most of the world.

God may cut back on His PHYSICAL blessings, but that’s just not true with His SPIRITUAL blessings. We have God’s own Son as our **personal** Savior. We get the credit for EVERYTHING Jesus did – BOTH His life of perfect love and **obedience** and His innocent death on the cross to **“take away the sin of the world.”** Jesus shares with us His Easter triumph over death and the grave. **Because of Jesus** – TRUSTING in Jesus - God has forgiven every one of our sins – **we are** God dear, **beloved redeemed children** – we have the privilege of prayer. **Trusting in Jesus** we are now going straight to heaven when we die and we can confidently look forward to living with a glorified body and soul in the **“new heaven and new earth.”** We have God’s Word NOT JUST AT church but for us to read at home every day. Look again at what God ALL GIVES and DOES for us in Holy Baptism and Holy Communion! Do YOU NEED some peace – hope – joy – comfort – encouragement – strength – patience – **acceptance**? God has it all FOR YOU in His Word and Sacraments and He’d just love to shower it all on you and me!

NORMALLY the Israelites were to bring their **“firstfruits”** to the priests at the temple in Jerusalem. That wasn’t possible for this **“man from Baal Shalishah.”** But he didn’t let that stop him from GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGING **God’s goodness**. He did the NEXT BEST thing. He brought his offering to **God’s prophet** Elisha. God used this man’s offering to HELP TAKE CARE of Elisha and some others. **As we gratefully acknowledge** GOD TAKING CARE of us we also...

II. Confidently trust God to take care of us.

This man was trusting God to CONTINUE **taking care** of him. The **“firstfruits”** marked the START of the harvest. Giving God the **“firstfruits”** you trusted that there would BE MORE to harvest. You trusted that you **wouldn’t** BE SHORT-CHANGED by putting God AHEAD of yourself.

Our offerings do that. They LOOK BACK with gratitude for **past blessings** and they LOOK AHEAD trusting God to **keep taking care** of us. Common sense says that’s NOT HOW to do it. **Common sense** says, **“Money I give to God** is money I can’t use for myself. The MORE I give to God the LESS I have to pay my bills – to take care of my family. THEREFORE I take care of myself FIRST and THEN **give to God.”** Common sense says that. FAITH TRUSTS God to keep taking care of us.

Elisha was trusting God to **take care** of him. Here he is and he has these 100 people to feed. **More than likely** they were students of Elisha who would be taught by him and then go teach the people. **Here’s a famine going** – Elisha has these 100 people to feed – HOW is he going to do that? Then OUT OF THE BLUE this man shows up with his **“twenty loaves of barley bread and some heads of new grain.”** This man was able to carry all this **“in a sack”** so it wasn’t a LARGE QUANTITY of food – certainly not ENOUGH to feed 100 people. Elisha’s servant realized that. When Elisha told him, **“Give it to the people to eat”** he asked Elisha, **“How can I set this before 100 men?”**

“But Elisha said, ‘Set it before the people so that they may eat, for this is what the LORD says: They will eat and have some left over.’” There’s the OBVIOUS CONNECTION with the gospel

reading. God miraculously fed a large group of people with NEXT TO NOTHING – and there were even leftovers!

With both of these miracles I wonder when the people NOTICED them happening. There's nothing fancy about either one. There's no GRAND ANNOUNCEMENT – no, "Hey, pay attention to what's about to happen." **In both cases** they just start passing out the food and they didn't run out – they even had some left over.

Obviously these were MIRACLES. There are other such miracles in the Bible. God can still do such miracles IF He wants to – but we shouldn't count on it. Oh, God still takes care of His people but He uses what we **could call** "NORMAL" means – you grow food – you work etc. AT TIMES the **times** may get tough. We may wonder how God is going to **get us through**. But IN THE END God **always comes through**. OFTEN it's just like these two miracles – we don't see God at work UNTIL we see the FINAL RESULTS. With rather plain ORDINARY WAYS God takes care of us.

It's THE SAME with God taking care of our **spiritual** needs. What's FANCY about going to church every week – having those devotions at home during the week – giving our children a Christian education – coming often to Holy Communion – remembering our Baptism? Yet through that God is QUIETLY **taking care** of our souls – strengthening our faith – assuring us of His **love** – His **forgiveness** – of **eternal life** in heaven. THROUGH THAT God gives us the strength to **overcome** temptation – the courage to face difficult days – the hope to KEEP PLUGGING along.

"Give it to the people to eat. For this is what the LORD says: They will eat and have some left over." AND SO it happened. Jesus teaches us to pray, ***"Give us this day our daily bread."*** AND SO God does. Jesus orders us, ***"Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things*** (food, clothing, etc.) ***will be given to you as well."*** AND SO it happens. God STILL takes care of His people. We gratefully acknowledge that **with our offerings** and we confidently trust God to **continue** to take care of us. Amen.

HYMN 484