

Laetare
St. John 6:1-15
March 11th, 2018
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

When They Were Filled

In Nomine Iesu!

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

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

There are three periods in the Lenten season: Pre-Lent, Lent and Passiontide. During Pre-Lent the Church's focus is on calling people to catechesis and instruction that they may be enlightened in the one, true faith. We saw that in the "gesima" Gospels, where the laborers were called into the vineyard, then the seed was planted through catechesis, and then the blind eyes were opened to the Gospel.

During Lent proper, the time we are in now, the Church's focus is on our sin and the consequences of sin. The Church's focus is inward to the corruption within in us that is provoked and brought out in our daily lives through the work of the devil, the world and our own corrupt sinful self. The ultimate goal is for repentance. And as you will remember from the Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther there are two parts to repentance: contrition, that is, sorrow over our sins, and most importantly, faith in our Lord + Jesus Christ to forgive us.

And that leads us to the third part of Lent—Passiontide. Passiontide is not so named, as is usually and erroneously put forth, because of the reading of Passion history on many of the days during Passiontide. The Church's focus during the upcoming section of Lent is on the cross of our Lord + Jesus Christ. That is what repentance does, it leads us to the cross of our Lord. We've spent the last few weeks looking inward at our sin (or at least you should have been), but starting next week the Church's focus is on the Passion of our Lord; on His cross and suffering (which is what "passion" literally means, it means to suffer). Therefore, the Church's focus moves from the inward to the outward; from our sin and shame to the cross of our Lord + Jesus Christ, which frees us from sin. Just as St. Paul said in the Epistle. We are no longer children of slavery—slavery to the devil, the world, and our flesh, but we are freed from those bonds, and live as children and fellow-heirs of our Lord and Brother Christ.

However, before we get to Passiontide, we have today: Laetare. One of the three "rejoice" Sundays of the Church's year. The first is on the Third Sunday in Advent, Gaudete. The second is today on the Fourth Sunday in Lent, Laetare. And, the third is on the Third Sunday of Easter, Jubilate. These three Sundays all mark the halfway points of their respective seasons, and they all mark a change in the direction of the season. With Gaudete Sunday in Advent the focus of the Church shifts from the coming of our Lord on the Last Day to His coming as the Savior born in Bethlehem; the

Church's focus is on Christmas. With Jubilate the Church's focus is directed toward the Lord's Ascension and the coming of the Holy Ghost on Whitsunday. Today, the Church's focus shifts from our inward reflection upon our sin, to the passion of our Lord + Jesus Christ. This is done by giving us a break from all the texts where we see the destruction and corruption of the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh, and we get a picture of Heaven.

That is why another name for this Sunday is "Refreshment Sunday." We are refreshed from our sins, by our Lord's feeding us and sustaining us with His Word and Sacraments. And we see a picture of this in today's Gospel. The crowds numbering about five thousand men, plus women and children, all came to our Lord to hear His Word; to hear Him preach. But they are also fed by the Lord, as we see an allusion to the Sacrament of the Altar, wherein our Lord feeds and sustains our souls through His Body and Blood given in bread and wine.

As we prayed in the Collect for the Day, we do worthily deserve to be punished for our evil deeds—our sins—but we pray that God would be merciful to us and give us relief through His abundant grace. He gives us relief from our sins, through the preached Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. He preaches into our ears that we are absolved, that is, forgiven of our sins on account of what He did for us on the tree of the holy cross. He washes us with water and His Word in Holy Baptism and cleanses us from all sin. He feeds us with His Body and Blood given in bread and wine and provides for our souls the gifts He won on the cross: forgiveness, life and salvation.

In this meal we get a foretaste of Heaven: All the saints gathered around the throne of our Lord + Jesus Christ, united in fellowship with one another and with our Lord + Jesus Christ. As He gives out the gifts of Heaven.

We see a picture of this in today's Gospel from the Evangelist St. John. The Lord + Jesus feeds the crowds. But, He does not just give them enough to satisfy their hunger cravings. St. John records that they ate as much as they wanted. And the food did not stop coming until they were ALL filled. Even then, after everyone had eaten all they desired to eat, the disciples took up twelve baskets worth of leftovers. One basket for each of the twelve disciples. This is how the Lord is with His gifts. He does not skimp. He is not a miser who only gives what is necessary after we have sufficiently begged Him for scraps. No, our Lord is abundant in His mercy and grace. He pours out His gifts on His people abundantly.

This is why the psalmist in the Introit for today sings about being glad to go into the house of the Lord, because He knows that the Lord will give Him what He wants in that place and give it to him abundantly. This is why on this refreshment Sunday we get a picture of Heaven in our Propers. For this is what the Lord will do for all those who believe on His Name for all eternity: He will draw them all to Himself and feed them and sustain them and wipe away every tear of joy that falls from their eyes.

Every time we gather around God's Word and Sacrament we are getting a foretaste of Heaven. Which is why it is important for us to be here in this place, whenever we gather, for the Lord feeds and sustains us with His Word. Through the Gospel He draws us out of the dark places of our sin-filled soul and turns our focus to the cross—the instrument of His grace and mercy toward us; the place wherein our sins are paid for in full. He even goes a step further and gives us a meal of remembrance of that perfect and innocent sacrifice for us, by giving us His true and substantial Body and Blood in bread and wine. When we eat and drink this meal, we remember the sacrifice of our Lord for us. And, we remember that He is abundant in His gifts. He abundantly forgives us of our sin. He washes away all sin from us. He nails our sin to the tree of the holy cross and there it remains paid for in full. He feeds and nourishes our souls with His very Body and Blood, so that we may rejoice in knowing that our sins have been forgiven.

“I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go into the house of the Lord’” says the psalmist. For when we are here in this place—in the house of the Lord—we are living in a foretaste of the city of Jerusalem in Heaven. We are protected on all sides by the mountains of the Lord—His holy Words. And He sustains us with His heavenly food. He does not skimp but gives it to us abundantly. He gives His gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation to us, and gives us as much as we desire in this place. So then, come to this house often, and receive the gifts of Heaven abundantly as much as you desire. Invite your friends, relatives and neighbors to this holy house, so that they too may receive from the Lord as much as they desire.

Enjoy the refreshment from your struggle with sin when you come to this house of the Lord and receive His gifts. For our Lord desires to take your eyes off of your sin, and He desires to place you at the foot of His holy cross, where He suffered and died in innocence to redeem you from your sin and give you an eternal place where He can feed and sustain you with all good things. Rejoice in this reality for you and be refreshed from all your struggles. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo gloria!