

Mount Olive Lutheran Church  
5327 W. Washington Blvd.  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53208-1798

The Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost  
July 31, 2005  
Romans 8:31-38

*"The Lord Will Provide"*  
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Introduction

There may be times during the church year when you listen to the three Scripture lessons that are usually read on Sunday and find it difficult to see the connection between the lessons. This is due to the fact that in most instances when the lectionary (that is, the series of readings) was developed the decision was made to relate the Old Testament reading to the Gospel and to allow the Epistle lessons to be a continuous reading through one particular Epistle. This is especially the case during the Pentecost season, the season of the church. Since the Second Sunday after Pentecost and until the Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost the readings this year are from St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans. So it should not be surprising if the reading in the Epistle does not necessarily match the themes of the other readings.

That is not the case this morning, however. As I looked at the readings assigned for today, it was very clear that they all shared a common theme. The word of God for this the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost reminds us as our theme states that THE LORD WILL PROVIDE. In each lesson we see one aspect emphasized of the Lord's gifts to us. This morning we will briefly look at each of the lessons and see that the Lord does provide for us: physically, spiritually, eternally.

I. Physically

The Lord provides for us physically. At first, I am sure that the disciples in the Gospel lesson were overwhelmed at the size of the crowd which had followed them and Jesus to the lonely place far from their homes. They must have been even more overwhelmed when they brought to Jesus' attention the fact that the people needed to be dismissed so they could buy food and He said, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." (Matt. 14:16) And then their doubts arose, "We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish." But their doubt was turned to wonder as the Lord Himself took the bread and fish, blessed it, and distributed it to the more than 5,000 who were there. And when the people had eaten, there remained twelve baskets of broken pieces, more indeed than they had started with.

This account of the feeding of the 5,000 should indeed remind us that the Lord does provide us "with all that we need to support this body and life" as Martin Luther writes in his Small Catechism. "The eyes of all wait upon You, O Lord, and you give them their meat in due season." So writes the Psalmist. The Lord provides for our physical needs. And so often we worry and fret. We see only the five loaves and two fish and do not humbly see the power

of the Lord or give thanks to Him for all His gifts. For He will take care of us. The Lord will provide according to His good pleasure. And sometimes He provides most unexpectedly. As we consider our own congregation and its needs, we are mindful of the fact that the Lord continues to provide for us through the gifts of his people, like you and me. And sometimes he provides more than we can imagine or in ways that are beyond our understanding. Sometimes it is like the widow's cruse of oil in the Old Testament story of Elijah the prophet. The Lord gives us what we need. Most assuredly, we need to be reminded that it is our gracious Lord who provides.

## II. Spiritually

Secondly, in the Gospel there is also a strong reminder that Lord provides for us not only physically but also spiritually. For when Jesus saw the great crowd that followed Him, "He had compassion on them." The Greek word used here indicates that the Lord's innermost organs were moved. We would probably say, "His heart was moved." (Matt. 14:14) The Lord provides for our spiritual health as well. And what more beautiful words describe this than the Old Testament Lesson for today. For the prophet Isaiah speaks in the 55th chapter of the results of the work of the servant of the Lord whose great sacrifice is described in the 53rd chapter. And the work of the Lord leads to the beautiful invitation that we hear: "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare." (Isa. 55:1-2)

What is clear from these words is although the Lord speaks here of food (wine and milk and bread), they are food for the soul. And they are foods that no money can buy. For they are the gifts of the grace of God. Yet they have a price. For the prophet reminds us that these gifts are part of the everlasting covenant and the faithful love promised to David. Indeed, the price of these gifts was borne by the eternal Son of David, our Lord Jesus Christ. For just as the Lord had compassion on the multitude who followed him into the wilderness so he had compassion for the whole world. His blood paid the guilt offering for the sins of the world. His life that He shed was for the forgiveness of our sins. And in Him indeed the invitation is free. It is by grace that the Lord offers to us salvation full and free. The Lord provides for us spiritually.

## III. Eternally

So far, we have not even discussed the epistle for today. And at first glance the words of St. Paul may well cause some to wonder how those words fit our theme that "The Lord Will Provide". Think of some of those words: Trouble--Hardship--Persecution--Famine--Nakedness--Danger--Sword. Paul writes, "For your sake we face death all day long." The words of Paul give us a harsh dose of reality: The reality of the world in which we live. It is a world condemned in sin and sentenced to death. It is a world that is hostile to God and

to the people of God.

In our prayers today we will include many who are probably asking just such a question about God and his providing for us. There are those with long term illnesses and those undergoing treatment for cancer. There are some facing surgery. And there are other griefs and sorrows and sicknesses as well. Just this past week, Sharron Kraft, the wife of our former Day School principal, Glenn Kraft, was called home following a struggle with lung cancer. In each and every family I am sure that we could find numerous examples. And it is so easy then for the question to come up: "Why?" If God is a loving God how could these things happen? And then comes back the answer like a thunderclap: "If God is for us, who can be against us." For the Lord does indeed provides for us not just physically and spiritually but also eternally. "He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all--how will he not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?"

When all else fails us, when we cling to life with our last gasping breath, when we face eternity, just one thing will matter, just one word will be all we need. For it is for just that moment that the word of St. Paul rings out with the eternal truth of God: "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Nothing can separate us! Nothing! For we have his promise: "Fear Not, I have redeemed you. I have called you by name. You are mine." And nothing can separate us from that. For the Lord will provide for us eternally. The sorrows of this life, the fear of death, the pain of disease, the ache of loneliness will all be overwhelmed by the joy and glory of eternity. The Lord is with us now and we shall be with Him forevermore.

Very few, outside the Scriptures, has captured these thoughts more beautifully than the Lutheran pastor and poet, Paul Gerhardt, in the hymn: "If God Himself be for Me." When you read about his life, these words of his become even more meaningful. For following the time he wrote this hymn, four of his children and his wife died of disease. He even lost his job in Berlin as preacher because he refused to compromise the truth of the Word of God in following an edict of the elector of Brandenburg. It is interesting, last month, I stood outside of the church in Berlin where he served as pastor, St. Nicholai. There is a large bronze plaque outside commemorating Paul Gerhardt, the pastor, and Johann Cruger, the organist. The plaque is interesting in its omission. It fails to note the exile of this beloved pastor from his pulpit because He would not compromise his confession. In the parish church in Luebben, where Paul Gerhardt is buried, these words are inscribed on a memorial: "A Theologian Sifted in Satan's Sieve". Yet he had the greatest of faith in his Lord and Savior. May his words be our closing prayer:

Though earth, Lord, break asunder,  
You are my Savior true;  
No fire or sword or thunder  
Shall sever me from you;

No danger, thirst, or hunger,  
No pain or poverty,  
No mighty princes anger  
Shall ever vanquish me.

For joy my heart is ringing;  
All sorrow disappears;  
And full of mirth and singing,  
It wipes away all tears.  
The sun that cheers my spirit  
Is Jesus Christ, my King;  
The heaven I shall inherit  
Makes me rejoice and sing.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.