

### The Lord's My Shepherd...I'll not Want!

**"The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing."** These words are from Psalm 145, words that are often spoken at Thanksgiving time, or before a family meal. Those words express a wonderful truth that we'd never want to overlook: All living things receive their daily needs from God.

That's true even if there are people who don't believe it to be true. The atheist may say, "*There's no God,*" but that doesn't make someone else responsible for sending the rain and the sun and the seasons. Even Christians can forget to recognize God's blessings, instead of taking them for granted and failing to give thanks for them, but that doesn't change the fact that God is still the provider of everything we need.

While this world may be filled with millions of self-made people - "*I have all I need because of my own strength and smarts and skills*" - you and I recognize that we are totally dependent on our God.. .and that our God is totally dependable. He gives us everything we need for our bodies and for our souls.

Today's Gospel from Matthew 14 supports that fact. The Holy Spirit used four different writers to record the words and works of Jesus - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. By divine design, they don't all record the same events nor do they give the same amount of detail about any one occasion. But it is interesting to note, that aside from the events that surround the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, the feeding of the 5,000 is the only miracle that is recorded by all four Gospel writers. We don't have to make too much of that. But it is interesting. Maybe this account - as well as any other - clearly demonstrates the love Jesus has for his people. We're told, **"When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick."**

Keep in mind, Jesus was on a boat looking for some quiet down-time. He and his disciples were cutting across the north end of the Sea of Galilee. Meanwhile, people were following Jesus as they walked on the shore. So when Jesus reaches his destination there is a huge crowd of people waiting for him. A crowd that had walked close to 8 miles (roughly the distance from our church parking lot to the Walmart in E-town). Some of them brought their sick friends or family members with them. An 8-mile trip to listen to the words of Jesus - sometimes we grumble about having to drive 8 miles to church in our cars.

**"He had compassion on them."** These people were tired and hungry and Jesus was concerned about that. John tells us that before Jesus and his disciples even met up with the people, Jesus (already knowing their needs and already thinking about how to help them) turned to his disciples and said, **"Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?"** That's an interesting question, because John goes on to tell us that Jesus already knew what he was going to do, but he wanted his disciples to give it some serious thought. He was testing them. He was giving them an opportunity to put their faith in him.

So Jesus asked them the question. He then spent his time preaching and teaching and healing. Meanwhile, the disciples were coming up with every possible answer to his question, "*Where are we going to get bread for these people?*" They counted up the people - there were 5,000 men, not even counting women and children. They counted the cost - it would take 8 months of an average man's salary to buy enough food for these people, and even then each person would only get a very small portion. They counted their available resources - and they found only a boy who had five small loaves of bread and two small fish.

Matthew tells us that by evening, they had come up with an answer: **"As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, 'This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.'**" In other words, the problem is too big. The challenge is too great. It can't be done!

Jesus had a different solution in mind, a solution we've come to know well. He - in a marvelous, miraculous way - fed that huge crowd with those five small loaves of bread and two small fish. Did they all get just a small sliver of food? Was this just a snack to tide them over? Did many go unfed and hungry? **"They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over."** The point is clear: Jesus has the desire and the ability to provide for the needs of his children.

The skeptics may say, *"Just wait a minute. God hasn't met all my needs. I'm in debt up to my ears. I work long, hard hours but I can barely pay my mortgage. Last year I had to sell one of my cars just to make ends meet. This summer I had to cancel my trip to Germany."* Do you get the point? Our Lord is concerned about the things that we NEED and he promises to give us the things that we NEED. He never promises to give us all those extras. He never promises to open up his hands and give us all those things we've come to expect or all those things we think we deserve. When we pray, **"Give us this day our daily bread,"** we are asking our Lord to keep his promise of giving us just the things that are necessary for our bodies and life. In the same breath we can also ask our Lord to give us hearts that are content and satisfied with his gifts.

Another skeptic may say, *"Don't you listen to the news? There's famine and starvation all over the world. There are homeless people eating out of dumpsters and children going hungry. Where is your God?"* Yet along with famine and starvation does there not exist surplus and waste? Does the blame really belong on God's doorstep or can the blame be placed squarely on mankind's shoulders? Does every country, every city, every family, every individual practice perfect management of the blessings given from above?

By God's grace, you and I recognize that we are totally dependent on our God and that our God is totally dependable. He wants us to learn to be content. He wants us to learn to be good managers of his blessings. He wants us to get used to looking to him and depending on him for all things. He wants us to have hearts that are filled with gratitude and thanksgiving. And he wants us not to put an unhealthy emphasis on material things, but to instead, **"Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you as well."**

Put yourself in that crowd. There are over 5,000 people sitting on the grass around you. The disciples make their way through the crowd and eventually you are divided up into groups and lined up into rows. Maybe at first there is some confusion - babies crying, people getting situated. But soon enough, don't you think all eyes were fixed on Jesus as he takes the bread and fish into his hands, gives thanks, and begins to miraculously divide and multiply it for the people? His love for the people is evident.

But there's really more to the story. Soon after this miracle he met up with the crowds again, the memory of the miracle still very fresh in their minds. Jesus tells them, *"I am the Bread of Life. He who feeds on this bread (in other words, he who believes in me) — will have eternal life."* Jesus didn't want these people to think that he was only concerned about their material welfare and that he was only concerned about meeting their physical needs. His concern for them is much deeper.

He wanted them to know why he really came. He wanted them to know about a better gift than just free bread and fish. He wanted them to know him. This is the One who would die for all people. This is the One who would with his death, make peace between a sin-stained people and a holy God. This is the One who would offer freedom from death and hell. This is the One who would later break bread and say, *"This is my body, this is my blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins."* This is the One who left his Word to stand from generation to generation so that no one would have to starve spiritually.

When Jesus was finished with that sermon, many stopped following him. They were interested only in what Jesus could give them in their daily, physical lives - a temptation even for us today. But as the Apostle Paul reminds us, how shortchanged we would be, how near-sighted and how foolish we would be if only for this life we had hope in Christ!

I am truly blessed. I have a wonderful family. I live in a country that has the highest overall standard of living in the history of the world. I have a beautiful roof over my head, two dependable automobiles, car insurance, health insurance, life insurance, satellite TV, a closet full of clothes, a pantry full of food, a garage full of junk. Yet I am not a rich man. In fact, the government declares me to be poverty stricken.

But what do I lack? Has God kept his promise by meeting all my physical needs? Yes. In fact, he's given me so much more than just my daily bread. But what if I die tomorrow? The clothes and the cars and the creature comforts will be of little value. There in my dying hour my bank account and my beautiful home and my abundant possessions will not race to my side and come to my rescue. But there will stand Jesus, reminding me of his promises: *"I have paid for all your offenses. I have been your perfect substitute. I have conquered death. Only believe."*

The Lord's my shepherd. I'll not want. I'll lack nothing - spiritually or physically, in life or in death. Jesus

provides for all my needs. He brings peace and comfort to my heart. He brings purpose and meaning to my life. Amen.