

“Come and Eat”

Romans 9:1-5

In those words, Paul makes one of the most profound statements of love and mercy and compassion in all of Scripture. It is a statement that I don't know that I could honestly make. Paul is essentially saying that, if he could, he would willingly be accursed by God, be separated from Christ, and remain in hell for all eternity if it would mean that his fellow Israelites would receive the Gospel and take their rightful place as the people of the covenant – the new covenant in Christ's blood.

We have heard Jesus speak of the fiery furnace of hell where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth in the parables the past few weeks. That never-ending agony of a hopeless eternity separated from God is so terrifying that it goes way beyond anything that we ever want to think about.

As I said, I don't think that I could ever honestly share Paul's willingness to trade places. I could make a magnanimous statement about how, for the sake of the lost, I would be willing to give up my place in the kingdom of God – however, it would only be with the full knowledge that I cannot trade places with anyone. Each person will be responsible for giving their own account on the Last Day.

I can't trade places with anyone. I can't have enough faith to cover anyone else also. Likewise, I cannot borrow from the abundance of faith from my parents, friends, church members, or anyone else. My hope and your hope can only be found in Christ.

I believe that Paul's statement of love and compassion is genuine, and he says, "I am speaking the truth . . . I am not lying." If you read in Acts or 2 Corinthians, what Paul endured for the sake of the Gospel being heard, his compassion was genuine. He went through "hell on earth" for the sake of the lost. After preaching at Lystra, the crowd tried to stone him to death, dragged him out of town, thought he was dead; then Paul got up and walked right back into the same town. That is genuine compassion for the lost.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus has genuine compassion for the massive crowd who came to Him. His compassion for them is not concern for their empty stomachs. Providing fish and bread to fill them for one day is not the purpose of His ministry to the people. He has compassion on them, and like St. Paul speaks of his willingness to give up his rightful place in heaven for the sake of the lost, Jesus actually gives up His rightful place in the heavenly realm, comes to earth and endures a lifetime of humiliation, and then endures the ultimate humiliation, endures complete separation from God the Father (which is the worst part of being in hell). And unlike Paul at Lystra, Jesus is going to die at the hands of evil men. This is compassion.

And in the feeding of the 5000, in the actual eating, we see a foreshadowing of what is to come. He took the fish and the bread, gave thanks, broke the loaves, and gave it to the disciples. Does that sound familiar? The words are identical to what happens in the Upper Room. Jesus gives this bread and fish to the disciples to give to the people – and all of the crowd ate and were satisfied. There was an abundance. There was enough for this great crowd and more if need be.

Jesus is going to show compassion on the people, and His compassion will cover any great crowd. His compassion will be enough to feed the whole world with the food He has to offer.

We heard in our OT reading from Isaiah 55 the song of the Suffering Servant who would be pierced for our transgressions and wounded for our iniquity. It is His song of compassion. Once again, we see where reading Scripture requires you to look at the context. We have already heard in Isaiah 53 how the Suffering Servant (the Messiah) has paid the full price for all that the people need – “he was pierced for our transgressions.”

Isaiah tells the people, I know that your spiritual body has hunger and cravings, so why are you bothering yourself and wasting your time and money on food that is not real food. You will never be satisfied. You feel empty and you try to fill yourself with all the different things that the world has to offer. But that food that is not really food.

Why do you spend your money for that which is not the bread of life? Why do you work so hard for the things of this world that will not last? We just finished a fantastic study of Ecclesiastes in our Thursday morning Bible class. Solomon keeps repeating that all of this that the world has to offer is vanity. It is like chasing after the wind.

Solomon spent the middle years of his life working to build his wealth until he became the richest man the world has ever known. It did not satisfy him. He had 700 wives and 300 concubines. It did not satisfy him. He said, "I searched my heart how to cheer my body with wine" and he surrounded himself with luxury and a life of ease and eating and drinking to his heart's content. This was his reward for all his hard work. It did not satisfy him. It was vanity. It was like chasing after the wind.

Isaiah and Paul and Jesus are all telling the same story. There is only one thing that matters. There is only one thing that is needed. Be filled with the one who became sin for us, who was pierced for our transgressions, who endured the separation of God the Father forsaking Him. There is bread and there is wine that is without price. Jesus knows how sin makes you feel separated from God – how sin has left you empty. He has genuine compassion for you. Come and eat. Amen.