

“Come and Eat”

Rom. 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 would like to think I could make, but I honestly don't know that I could make this statement. 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 would like to think that I would be willing to make that trade for the sake of people I love who do not share my joy in Christ, but 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 either. Likewise, I cannot borrow from the abundance of faith from my parents, friends, church members. 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 Acts or 2 Corinthians and see 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 they had done the job, thought he was dead; the crowd left him lying on the ground amid a pile of stones; 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 had compassion on them.

Just as 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 to pay the ransom price for the guilt of our sin. This is compassion. True compassion always comes with a cost. There will be a broken body and shed blood.

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. There will be a broken body and shed blood for all.

We heard in our OT reading from Isaiah 53 which is part of the song of the Suffering Servant we hear the beginnings of each year on Good Friday. We hear 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 hear in Isaiah 53 how the Suffering Servant (the Messiah) has paid the full price covering the guilt of all the people – “he was pierced for our transgressions.”

Isaiah goes on and we hear him now tell 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 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? I hear these words and the words of Solomon from Ecclesiastes keep echoing in my ears. 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 – who endured hell on earth bearing the weight of the cross so that we do not endure hell for all eternity.

There is bread and there is wine that comes without a price for you, only because the full price has already been paid in the broken body and shed blood which also comes to you without a price. Jesus knows how sin separates you from God – how sin has left you empty and seemingly alone. He has genuine compassion for you. He endured “hell on earth for you.” He invites you to come and eat. Amen.