

Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-29

4 The rirraff among them had a strong craving. Even the Israelites cried again and said, "Who will give us meat to eat? 5 We remember the fish we ate in Egypt for free, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. 6 Now our lives are wasting away. There is nothing but manna in front of us."

10 Moses heard the people crying throughout their clans, each at his tent's entrance. The LORD was outraged, and Moses was upset. 11 Moses said to the LORD, "Why have you treated your servant so badly? And why haven't I found favor in your eyes, for you have placed the burden of all these people on me? 12 Did I conceive all these people? Did I give birth to them, that you would say to me, 'Carry them at the breast, as a nurse carries an unweaned child,' to the fertile land that you promised their ancestors? 13 Where am I to get meat for all these people? They are crying before me and saying, 'Give us meat, so we can eat.' 14 I can't bear this people on my own.

They're too heavy for me. 15 If you're going to treat me like this, please kill me. If I've found favor in your eyes, then don't let me endure this wretched situation." 16 The LORD said to Moses, "Gather before me seventy men from Israel's elders, whom you know as elders and officers of the people. Take them to the meeting tent, and let them stand there with you.

24 So Moses went out and told the people the LORD's words. He assembled seventy men from the people's elders and placed them around the tent. 25 The LORD descended in a cloud, spoke to him, and took some of the spirit that was on him and placed it on the seventy elders. When the spirit rested on them, they prophesied, but only this once. 26 Two men had remained in the camp, one named Eldad and the second named Medad, and the spirit rested on them. They were among those registered, but they hadn't gone out to the tent, so they prophesied in the camp. 27 A young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." 28 Joshua, Nun's son and Moses' assistant since his youth, responded, "My master Moses, stop them!" 29 Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? If only all the LORD's people were prophets with the LORD placing his spirit on them!"

James 5:13-20

13 If any of you are suffering, they should pray. If any of you are happy, they should sing. 14 If any of you are sick, they should call for the elders of the church, and the elders should pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 Prayer that comes from faith will heal the sick, for the Lord will restore them to health. And if they have sinned, they will be forgiven. 16 For this reason, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous person is powerful in what it can achieve. 17 Elijah was a person just like us. When he earnestly prayed that it wouldn't rain, no rain fell for three and a half years. 18 He prayed again, God sent rain, and the earth produced its fruit. 19 My brothers and sisters, if any of you wander from the truth and someone turns back the wanderer, 20 recognize that whoever brings a sinner back from the wrong path will save them from death and will bring about the forgiveness of many sins.

Mark 9:38-50

38 John said to Jesus, "Teacher, we saw someone throwing demons out in your name, and we tried to stop him because he wasn't following us." 39 Jesus replied, "Don't stop him. No one who does powerful acts in my name can quickly turn around and curse me. 40 Whoever isn't against us is for us. 41 I assure you that whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will certainly be rewarded. 42 "As for whoever causes these little ones who believe in me to trip and fall into sin, it would be better for them to have a huge stone hung around their necks and to be thrown into the lake. 43 If your hand causes you to fall into sin, chop it off. It's better for you to enter into life crippled than to go away with two hands into the fire of hell, which can't be put out. 45 If your foot causes you to fall into sin, chop it off. It's better for you to enter life lame than to be thrown into hell with two feet. 47 If your eye causes you to fall into sin, tear it out. It's better for you to enter God's kingdom with one eye than to be thrown into hell with two. 48 That's a place where worms don't die and the fire never goes out. 49 Everyone will be salted with fire. 50 Salt is good; but if salt loses its saltiness, how will it become salty again? Maintain salt among yourselves and keep peace with each other."

Sermon

Grace to you and peace from God our Creator, our Resurrected Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit: Amen.

Today we're concluding our series, "Who is Jesus? Who Are We?" Over the past few weeks we've seen that Jesus is the Christ, our Savior, and so we are called to be little Christs in the world. We've seen that Jesus is the suffering servant, and in that light, we're called to be servants of all who Jesus came to serve. If you missed any of those sermons and would like to hear more, they're available on our website.

As we come to today's passage from Mark, I feel a bit of theological whiplash. We go from teaching to teaching to teaching seemingly without breath! "Whoever isn't against us is for us," Jesus tells us, something that challenges the divisiveness of our argumentative culture, because we usually think that if someone isn't explicitly for us, they must be against us. But before we can ask a clarifying question, Jesus moves on. He offers another teaching, that, "whoever causes these little ones who believe in me to trip and fall into sin, it would be better for them to have a huge stone hung around their necks and to be thrown into the lake." Yeesh. That's an intense statement, and once again challenges our cultural sense of free will. We think that if someone makes a bad decision, no matter my role in it, isn't that their fault?

But once again, before we can bring this up, Jesus again turns to a new teaching as he says, "If your eye causes you to fall into sin, tear it out. It's better for you to enter God's kingdom with one eye than to be thrown into hell with two." Whoa. Seriously, Lord? Now you're sounding sadomasochistic. But as we raise our hands to interrupt these shenanigans, Jesus changes gears once again! "Everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if salt loses its saltiness, how will it become salty again?"

Maintain salt among yourselves and keep peace with each other." By the time the Gospel passage is done, we can barely take in this metaphorical imagery of the taste we offer as the salt of the world. Instead, we've drank from a fire hose, gorged ourselves on a buffet of teaching, and we just aren't quite sure what to think.

With all this in mind, we come again to our question. Who is Jesus, and who are we? Let's just take the first part. What does this passage tell us about Jesus, other than he apparently has the attention span of a puppy? What we have to remember about this point of Mark's Gospel is that this paragraph is part of Jesus' last teachings before he enters Jerusalem. In other words, Jesus is preparing to die. When my grandparents came to the realization that death was much closer than they realized, they did this too. They started sharing all the wisdom they had to offer, not to mention giving away absolutely everything in their homes. They wanted to share all of themselves with us before they faced death. Similarly, Jesus comes with this teaching and sets a table with some of his most essential wisdom before he enters death and resurrection, and these verses represent only a portion of that feast.

One of my favorite and most challenging dining experiences is the Brazilian steakhouse. When you enter one of these places, often the first thing you notice is the huge all-you-can-eat buffet of salads, vegetables, and side dishes. Just this is already a meal fit for an eating competition, even without the meat. But then, you notice the waiters. With swords. And unlike medieval times, there's no play fighting with these blades. Instead, each steel hold massive pieces of meat. Prime cuts of beef and pork, roasts and chops and steaks, not to mention all sorts of poultry. Off of these swords, this meat is served to you at any point you wish. Even with your best intents to sample

everything, eventually you realize that the magnitude of this banquet is simply beyond your comprehension, not to mention the capacity of your stomach.

At this point in the life of Jesus, he's offering a repast even beyond that we find at Brazilian steakhouses. His teachings become this kind of overwhelming experience where we see the fullness of who He is and just simply take it all in. What we find is that **Jesus is the Feast of Salvation**. Now, this doesn't mean that Jesus' identity or teaching is a smorgasbord from which we simply take what we like or want and leave what we find unsavory. It means that Jesus is full of good things, so much goodness that we're often overwhelmed, for we can only comprehend so much of God at any one time. And the place where we find the fullness of that feast tangibly is here, on the table, in the bread and wine of Eucharist.

But how can a morsel of bread and a thimble of wine be a feast? One of the mysteries of faith is that we profess is we find the fullness of God in these simple elements of bread and wine. Just as God chose to inhabit our limited human form in the person of Jesus, so too God chooses to become a part of creation once again in the communion meal. One of the promises we have is that, just like a Brazilian steakhouse, there will always be more than enough of Jesus to satisfy our needs. Our needs for life abundant are met in Jesus. Our needs for deliverance are met in Jesus. Our needs for healing are met in Jesus. Even in the tiniest bites of bread and sips of wine, we find the fullness of God to meet not only our own needs, but the needs of the world, the needs of the cosmos. Jesus is the Feast of Salvation, not only for ourselves but for all things.

And as if that weren't enough, what we find in the Eucharist is not just the fullness of Jesus to save us, but the fullness of God transformative touch. Do you remember the

story of King Midas? Everything this king touched turned to gold. His touch transformed even the most mundane materials into something spectacular, even the most flawed elements into something pure.

This is something like what happens in communion. God's presence changes us, taking our brokenness and making it beautiful. As Lutherans we're committed to the belief that God is present in the bread and the wine. First of all, this was what Jesus himself said, which is why we repeat Jesus' words every week before we come to this meal. In this presence Jesus doesn't turn us to gold; instead, as God touches us in this holy meal, so Jesus makes us holy as well. It is here that we sinners become saints. In some ancient liturgies, the pastor would hold high the bread and the wine and say "holy things for holy people." In this sense, we really are what we eat. We become the body of Christ as we consume the body of Christ.

Jesus is the Feast of Salvation and in this meal we become a Foretaste of the Feast to Come. As a foretaste, we aren't the feast itself. We are not Jesus. We don't save the world or offer abundant life. But as we act out our salvation, as we live life abundant, we offer the world a taste of what Jesus offers. We're something like the food court employees at the mall who hand out free samples as the world passes us by, carrying just a portion of the buffet away and giving a foretaste of what the restaurants have to offer. Yet, rather than a taste of teriyaki chicken or steak hoagies, we're called to offer a taste of the salvation we've received, a sampling of the abundant life Jesus gave to us.

That's why the last portion of our worship service each week isn't called the "ending" or the "closing" but the "sending." We're sent each week as those who've once again come into contact with God in communion, once again made holy in our

sharing of a holy meal, and sent to share a taste of that holiness, a taste of that salvation with those we meet in our everyday lives.

This means that, much like the peddlers of Sbarro pizza who invite everyone to try a bite, we're called to share the flavor of God with all that we meet. We ought to share a foretaste of God's kingdom with our coworkers and our mail carrier. We ought to share a foretaste of God's grace with our dentist and our grocer. We ought to share a foretaste of abundant life with our teachers and our repair technicians. With the factory workers and retirees. With the managers and the wait staff. With our family and with strangers, with friends and with adversaries, we're called to become a foretaste of the fullness of God.

Why is that? Because throughout that foretaste, through the lives that we share every day, God's working to call people back to this community, back to this table, back to the holiness we see and receive in this meal. That's our saltiness, the taste that we bring to the world, to flavor all creation with the spice of Jesus Christ. We're called to remind our culture that, rather than constant division, we ought to find the common ground that we share. If we're not against one another, then we're for one another. We're called to protect the meek and not lead the innocent astray, but instead to offer them a foretaste of their deliverance in Christ Jesus. We're called to recognize that the life of Christ requires something of us, that the holiness we receive is to be lived out, and so we remove the obstacles in our lives that prevent us from that life. We must cut off the appendages that weigh us down from the life of heaven and instead embrace the fullness of the mysterious feast so that we might live a sample of that tangible Kingdom life.

Jesus is the Feast of Salvation, and as we participate in that feast today, we're made into a foretaste of that feast to come. We become bearers of that holiness, salted with the taste of eternity. Let's live in ways that share that taste with all whom we meet. Amen.