

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We hear today Matthew's account of Jesus feeding the crowd of five thousand. The scene is a picture of both the proclamation of the word, by which God's people thrive, and holy communion, in which the blessing of Jesus creates continuous food for his people.

But what stands out most to me right now is that all this took place in a wilderness desert—specifically, “a deserted place.” Even when the crowds arrived, the location was still perceived as empty and forsaken. As the disciples themselves described it: “This is a deserted place.” Why? They saw no sustenance there—not for Jesus, not for themselves, not for the crowds for whom they felt responsibility.

But deserts of isolated wilderness are rarely as lacking as they may first appear. I'm reminded in this of a collection of ancient writings known as *The Desert Fathers: Sayings of the Early Christian Monks*. These men and women embraced lives of solitude in the Egyptian, Palestinian, and Syrian deserts beginning in the 300's.

Fitting for today, one of their stories is about food. In this very short story, a hermit came to see another hermit, who cooked a few lentils and said, “Let us worship God and then eat.” One of them recited all the psalms. The other read and meditated upon two of the greater prophets. (Maybe it was Isaiah and Jeremiah? Maybe Ezekiel and Daniel?) In the morning, the visitor went away. They had forgotten to eat the lentils.

### **Let Us Be Gathered**

#### **Confession and Forgiveness**

Blessed be the holy Trinity, † one God,  
whose steadfast love is everlasting,  
whose faithfulness endures from generation to generation.  
Amen.

Trusting in the mercy of God, let us confess our sin.  
*Silence is kept for reflection.*

Reconciling God,  
we confess that we do not trust your abundance,  
and we deny your presence in our lives.  
We place our hope in ourselves  
and rely on our own efforts.  
We fail to believe that you provide enough for all.  
We abuse your good creation for our own benefit.  
We fear difference and do not welcome others  
as you have welcomed us.  
We sin in thought, word, and deed.  
By your grace, forgive us;  
through your love, renew us;  
and in your Spirit, lead us;  
so that we may live and serve you in newness of life.  
Amen.

Beloved of God,  
by the radical abundance of divine mercy  
we have peace with God through † Christ Jesus,  
through whom we have obtained grace upon grace.  
Our sins are forgiven.  
Let us live now in hope.  
For hope does not disappoint,  
because God's love has been poured into our hearts  
through the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

### **Gathering Song**

From Saint Mark Lutheran Church in Aurora, Illinois, we are gathered in song by Kristin Young as she leads us in singing "Lord Whose Love in Humble Service" (ELW #712). We join the song in pleading to God, "send your power to our world to make it whole."

Here is the video link: [https://youtu.be/oRIS1JCEw\\_w?t=77](https://youtu.be/oRIS1JCEw_w?t=77).

- 1      *Lord, whose love in humble service  
bore the weight of human need,  
who upon the cross, forsaken,  
worked your mercy's perfect deed:  
we, your servants, bring the worship  
not of voice alone, but heart;  
consecrating to your purpose  
ev'ry gift which you impart.*
  
- 2      *Still your children wander homeless;  
still the hungry cry for bread;  
still the captives long for freedom;  
still in grief we mourn our dead.  
As you, Lord, in deep compassion  
healed the sick and freed the soul,  
by your Spirit send your power  
to our world to make it whole.*
  
- 3      *As we worship, grant us vision,  
till your love's revealing light  
in its height and depth and greatness  
dawns upon our quickened sight,  
making known the needs and burdens  
your compassion bids us bear,  
stirring us to ardent service,  
your abundant life to share.*
  
- 4      *Called by worship to your service,  
forth in your dear name we go,  
to the child, the youth, the aged,  
love in living deeds to show;  
hope and health, good will and comfort,  
counsel, aid and peace we give,  
that your servants, Lord, in freedom  
may your mercy know and live.*

### **Prayer of the Day**

*Let us pray.*

Glorious God,

your generosity waters the world with goodness,  
and you cover creation with abundance.

Awaken in us a hunger for the food that satisfies both body and spirit,  
and with this food fill all the starving world;  
through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

## **Let Us Hear God's Word**

### **A reading from Isaiah:**

<sup>1</sup>Ho, everyone who thirsts,  
come to the waters;  
and you that have no money,  
come, buy and eat!  
Come, buy wine and milk  
without money and without price.  
<sup>2</sup>Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,  
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?  
Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,  
and delight yourselves in rich food.  
<sup>3</sup>Incline your ear, and come to me;  
listen, so that you may live.  
I will make with you an everlasting covenant,  
my steadfast, sure love for David.  
<sup>4</sup>See, I made him a witness to the peoples,  
a leader and commander for the peoples.  
<sup>5</sup>See, you shall call nations that you do not know,  
and nations that do not know you shall run to you,  
because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel,  
for he has glorified you. (Isaiah 55)

*The Word of the Lord.*

*Thanks be to God.*

### **A reading from the Psalms:**

<sup>8</sup>The Lord is gracious and full of compassion,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.  
<sup>9</sup>Lord, you are good to all,  
and your compassion is over all your works.  
<sup>14</sup>The Lord upholds all those who fall  
and lifts up those who are bowed down.  
<sup>15</sup>The eyes of all wait upon you, O Lord,  
and you give them their food in due season.  
<sup>16</sup>You open wide your hand  
and satisfy the desire of every living thing.  
<sup>17</sup>You are righteous in all your ways  
and loving in all your works.  
<sup>18</sup>You are near to all who call upon you,  
to all who call upon you faithfully.  
<sup>19</sup>You fulfill the desire of those who fear you;  
you hear their cry and save them.  
<sup>20</sup>You watch over all those who love you,  
but all the wicked you shall destroy.  
<sup>21</sup>My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord;  
let all flesh bless God's holy name forever and ever. (Psalm 145)

### **A reading from Romans:**

<sup>1</sup>I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit—<sup>2</sup>I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. <sup>3</sup>For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. <sup>4</sup>They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship,

and the promises;<sup>5</sup> to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. (Romans 9)

*Word of God. Word of life.  
Thanks be to God.*

***The holy gospel according to Matthew.  
Glory to you, O Lord.***

<sup>13</sup>Now when Jesus heard [about the beheading of John the Baptist], he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. <sup>14</sup>When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. <sup>15</sup>When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." <sup>16</sup>Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." <sup>17</sup>They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." <sup>18</sup>And he said, "Bring them here to me." <sup>19</sup>Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. <sup>20</sup>And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. <sup>21</sup>And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children. (Matthew 14)

*The Gospel of the Lord.  
Praise to you, O Christ.*

**Reflection on the Readings**

In the brief story of the hermits of the desert shared into today's introduction, we heard how God's word was their true food and source of sustenance. The lentils mattered not at all. Within that lesson, the one who chose to read the psalms could have done worse.

Psalms 145 is the last of the psalms attributed to David. At the same time, it is the first psalm of praise in a series that closes out the psalter (Psalms 145-150). While Psalm 145 belongs to David and expresses David's personal commitment to worship Yahweh, the psalm is not primarily about one individual's praise. It has a universal scope that, in verse 2, calls the whole of creation to "praise [God's] name forever and ever." Its universality is not limited to that opening verse. In the original Hebrew, the word for "all" appears seventeen times. And as Jason Byassee (a professor at the Vancouver School of Theology) notes: all creatures are present in their praise and thanksgiving to God (verse 14). Everything that eats (verse 15). Everything that desires (verse 16).

Perhaps it is this universality of praise that has made Psalm 145 so important to God's people. Its influence is deeply present in Judaism. Within that faith, the psalm does not stand apart or alone, but shapes other important prayers. One such prayer is the Kaddish, said in mourning for the loss of a family member for a year after death. But it is not just in the words of occasional prayers. The Jewish teaching known as the Talmud promises that one who prays this psalm three times a day "may be sure of being a child of the world to come." Psalm 145 appears in Jewish prayer books more than any other psalm.

In our own context, although we may be tempted to glide over this psalm too quickly, Martin Luther certainly did not. In his *Small Catechism*, Luther encouraged the use of verses 15 and 16 together with the Lord's prayer before mealtimes. (If you have a copy of the *Small Catechism* at home, take a look at the section titled "Table Blessings." Note: Our red worship book, ELW, includes the catechism and you can find this instruction there on page 1167.)

What we see recognized in the universality of Psalm 145 is that God's choice of Israel is not a choice for Israel. It is not a case of "Israel first." Rather, it is of God, through Israel, being for everyone else. When we begin to think that God and God's blessings are ours (and maybe a bit for people like us), it is then that we are making a mistake. God's calling of the church is not for the church. Rather it is through the church, for everyone else. The calling that we share as God's baptized children is a call to gather and lead all creatures in praise.

And those blessings of God? Well, they are only “ours” in our ability and capacity to give them away. God’s regard in choosing a people is for all the others besides that people. I know this sounds strange. It sounds counter-intuitive. We aren’t used to the regard of our choices being for the sake of others. (When you last voted in an election, did you choose someone based on your own needs and desires? Or did you choose someone based on what they could do for other people?) Maybe that is why both Jewish tradition and Luther teach that it has to be said over and over again: *praise God, for God has chosen you, to bless not you, but all the others.*

The psalm insists that God is to be praised every day. It is, of course, easier to praise when things are going well and we are not living as hermits in desert solitude. But the emphasis on “every day” suggests we must praise when we would rather not, when the result is one we would not prefer. God is not to be manipulated into blessing us. We are rather, in the practice of this psalm, to manipulate ourselves into blessing God. The result of relentlessly praising this way is to notice God’s grand goodness, even when life is a challenge.

Religions have a tendency to draw small, tight circles when blessings are allocated. For us, not them. My side, my tribe, over against my enemies. But a key part of the gospel story is that the risen Jesus appears only to enemies: those who had rejected, abandoned, denied, and who thought they were done with him. They go from clueless, to confused, to clearer, and usually frightened.

And what does Jesus then do with those enemies? He does not execute retribution. He does not seek payback. He does not attack, bully, belittle, or belie. What he does is this: he forgives. And he creates community among former abandoners and betrayers—the only kind of people available. We call it church—the assembly of forgiven enemies.

Since we, as human beings, want to draw tightly the circle of blessings around us and people like us, the psalm draws us in the other direction: toward as wide a circle as possible. Everything that is fallen and low. Everything with eyes and need. Those who call, cry, desire, and fear. Everything that praises.

Human beings are praise-bearing creatures—we cannot help but offer praise. The question is whether we will praise an idol, an unworthy would-be god, or the true and living God who creates the worlds and raises the dead.

Psalm 145, so close to the heart of all biblical faith, is the food we need right now in this battered world. It is the conclusive rebuttal to the sinful instinct in us that says faith is for me and those like me.

No. You are chosen by God. You are selected. That means it is for everyone but you. And then, finally, it will be for you, too. It will be for those who knowingly and intentionally pass the Word around and offer praise, forever and ever. This is the bread that we share as we bear to others God’s fruit in a world of doubt—no lentils needed!

### **Hymn of the Day**

Today’s hymn of the day is “Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ” (ELW #674). Jen Conley leads our singing. Jen is a music therapist in the area of DeKalb, Illinois, and works primarily with adults and older adults.

Here is the video link: [https://youtu.be/CMIvKz\\_kbYs](https://youtu.be/CMIvKz_kbYs).

1        *Let us talents and tongues employ,  
          reaching out with a shout of joy:  
          bread is broken, the wine is poured,  
          Christ is spoken and seen and heard.*

#### *Refrain*

*Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,  
pass the Word around: loaves abound!  
Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,  
pass the Word around: loaves abound!*

2        *Christ is able to make us one,*

*at the table he sets the tone,  
teaching people to live to bless,  
love in word and in deed express. Refrain*

3 *Jesus calls us in, sends us out  
bearing fruit in a world of doubt,  
gives us love to tell, bread to share:  
God (Immanuel) ev'rywhere! Refrain*

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Confident of God's care and upheld by the Spirit, let us pray for all who are in need, responding to the words "Lord, you are good to all" with the phrase, "hear our cry and save us."

*A brief silence.*

O God our Savior, bless your church around the world. Where believers must be isolated from one another, be present through your gracious word. Give to our bishops, pastors, deacons and congregational leaders wisdom for their tasks in this challenging time.

*A brief silence.*

Lord, you are good to all: hear our cry and save us.

O God, Redeemer of all, bless the Jewish people with your covenant promises. Bring an end to global anti-Semitism, and strengthen ties of cooperation and friendship between Christians and Jews.

*A brief silence.*

Lord, you are good to all: hear our cry and save us.

O God, Creator of a wondrous earth, protect the glories of your seas and lands. Replenish ground water supplies, refresh lakes and ponds, send rains where there is drought, and shelter forests from wildfires.

*A brief silence.*

Lord, you are good to all: hear our cry and save us.

O God, Sovereign of the world, strengthen the people of all nations to strive for justice for all. Bring an end to racism in our society. Guide our elected officials in how to govern with integrity.

*A brief silence.*

Lord, you are good to all: hear our cry and save us.

O God, Storehouse of goodness, visit all who face COVID-19, especially those who are incarcerated. Give us, O Lord of life, a vaccine. Assist all who face eviction from their residence. Bring wholeness and healing to those who suffer in body or spirit, especially those whom we name here: Pat, Valetta, Paul, Vallie, LaVaune, Kathy, Frank, Lisa, Rita, April, Bev, Bob, Beth, and Marlene.

*A brief silence.*

Lord, you are good to all: hear our cry and save us.

O God, Giver of bread, teach us how to feed the hungry: the children starving in war zones, the families who cannot afford groceries, the homeless on our streets, the farmers devastated by pestilence. Give to all creatures their food in due season.

*A brief silence.*

Lord, you are good to all: hear our cry and save us.

O God, Lover of our souls, receive now the petitions of our hearts.

*A longer period of silence.*

Lord, you are good to all: hear our cry and save us.

O God, everlasting mercy, we praise you for the lives of all who have died in the faith. At the end, bring us with all your saints to your heavenly banquet.

*A brief silence.*

Lord, you are good to all: hear our cry and save us.

In the certain hope that nothing can separate us from your love, we offer these prayers to you; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

### **Offering Prayer**

*Let us pray.*

God of goodness and growth,  
all creation is yours,  
and your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.  
Water and word, wine and bread:  
these are signs of your abundant grace.  
Nourish us through these gifts,  
that we might proclaim your steadfast love  
in our communities and in the world,  
through Jesus Christ, our strength and our song.  
Amen.

### **Let Us Be Sent in Service**

“The eyes of all wait up on you, O Lord, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living creature.” (Luther’s *Small Catechism*, table blessing to recite when coming to a meal.)

*God’s Word in worship is our essential food. The Small Catechism teaches that, after eating, we should in the same manner fold our hands and recite devoutly:*

Give thanks to the Lord, for the Lord is good, for God’s mercy endures forever. God provides food for the cattle and for the young ravens when they cry. God is not impressed by the might of horse, and has no pleasure in the speed of a runner, but finds pleasure in those who fear the Lord, in those who await God’s steadfast love.

*Having recited this lesson, Luther teaches that we should next pray the Lord’s Prayer:*

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial,  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours,  
now and forever.  
Amen.

We close this table blessing by following Luther's instruction to recite this prayer:

We give thanks to you, Lord God our Father,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
for all your benefits,  
you who live and reign forever.  
Amen.

### **Sending Song**

"Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness" (ELW #843) is the song that sends us out from this meal of God's Word. St. Luke Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kitchener, Ontario, provides music leadership for this hymn of praise and thanksgiving.

Here is the video link: <https://youtu.be/qEyoy81KUcg>.

- 1     *Praise the One who breaks the darkness  
with a liberating light;  
praise the One who frees the pris'ners,  
turning blindness into sight.  
Praise the One who preached the gospel,  
healing ev'ry dread disease,  
calming storms and feeding thousands  
with the very bread of peace.*
  
- 2     *Praise the One who blessed the children  
with a strong yet gentle word;  
praise the One who drove out demons  
with a piercing, two-edged sword.  
Praise the One who brings cool water  
to the desert's burning sand;  
from this well comes living water  
quenching thirst in ev'ry land.*
  
- 3     *Praise the one true love incarnate:  
Christ, who suffered in our place;  
Jesus died and rose for many  
that we may know God by grace.  
Let us sing for joy and gladness,  
seeing what our God has done.  
Praise the one redeeming glory;  
praise the One who makes us one.*

### **Benediction**

Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers,  
nor things present, nor things to come,  
nor powers, nor height, nor depth,  
nor anything else in all creation,  
will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

God, the creator, ✠ Jesus, the Christ,  
and the Holy Spirit, the comforter,  
bless you and keep you in eternal love.  
Amen.