

“FUN TESTS” FROM OUR LORD

That we despair of our own hopes -- That we learn to place our trust in Him.

John 6:1-15

TEXT: *Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick. Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. The Jewish Passover Feast was near. When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them. Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten. After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.*

In Jesus' name, fellow redeemed:

We often speak of tests that our Lord imposes upon his children. Two weeks ago we recalled the “test” God gave Abraham when he told Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac as a burnt offering. It was a most difficult test that required great faith on the part of both Abraham and his son Isaac. The Bible tells us how Abraham was able to do what God commanded him: ***By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, 18 even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.*** He 11 It was because Abraham believed God's promise of the Savior that he was able to pass this most painful test. And it's important to know that God did NOT test Abraham to find out about Abraham's faith. God already knew Abraham's faith and that is why God stopped the test seconds before Abraham cut Isaac's throat. The test was to teach Abraham the lesson of that test: ***On the top of the mountain, the Lord will provide!***

God always knows exactly what we believe and all life's tests are from God to teach us, not to teach God. Before us is another example of our Lord testing his disciples. The Bible says: ***"Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.*** Once again, God knew exactly what he was doing. But compared to the test set before Abraham, we might say that this was a “fun test,” for it hardly involved the degree of personal pain and anxiety that was required of Abraham as he climbed Mt. Moriah to sacrifice Isaac. No, this test was quite mild, and yet it sets before us an amazing example of how our Lord tests us.

Even such “fun tests” are made so that we: Despair of our own hopes and learn to Place all our hopes in the Lord and his promises.

Martin Luther once wrote about how our Heavenly Father often “teases” his children. Not the kind of mean and malicious teasing the we used to do to our brothers and sisters that invoked the reprimand of our parents, but the kind of playful teasing that is done out of love. Luther compared this to a parent who give his child a rattle and then takes it away, and then gives it back again, and again, until they are both laughing and playing together. Look at how the Lord worked to train His own disciples in this!

A great crowd of people had been following Jesus because of ***the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick.*** The crowd numbered some 5000 men. According to Matthew's account there were, in addition to that 5000 figure, the women and children. There could have been nearly 10,000 men, women and children there! The Bible says: ***When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?"*** Here is a very real problem! And here is the tease: Jesus turns to His disciples to solve it!

The Bible says: ***Philip answered him, "eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each***

one to have a bite!" Then Peter spoke up: *"Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"* A ridiculous suggestion. Obviously, Peter was stating the hopelessness of the situation.

Here is what the Lord would have them realize. Jesus wants them to realize the hopelessness of their situation and to despair of all hope. Humanly speaking, there was nothing that they could do to help these people. There was nothing that they could do, even when Jesus himself seems overwhelmed. The Bible says: *When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?"*

It's common for us to fall into the trap of trusting in ourselves rather than in God. There is a TV commercial for a financial planning company that praises those who have their lives "well-planned." Jesus' disciples had no plan for how to feed over 5000 people! The reality of life is that the best laid plans are often disrupted. Especially for Christian is it dangerous to think that everything is in order since it is true that our Lord loves to "tease" us with tests that are made to cause us to despair of our own hopes and plans.

Why does the Lord do that to us? One of the favorite passages of many Christians is God's Word to his people in the face of the king of Babylon who would soon destroy their land, their capital city of Jerusalem and even their holy Temple, and then take them into exile. He said: *I know the plans I have for you, ... plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.* Je 29 "But aren't we about to see destruction, pain and sorrow? Aren't we about to be taken into exile to far away Babylon?" And when our plans fall through and we see no hope, the beauty of this is that we have no hope but Jesus. What a wonderful predicament that is!

Peter said it best: what we have is not going to do it! *Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?* Is there, Can we hear in Peter's words, possibly, a hint of faith in Jesus' ability to do something with these few elements? I think so. But even a hint of faith is still faith! And what a wonderful thing faith in Jesus is! Faith in Jesus is NEVER disappointed! For as the Bible says about this situation: Jesus, our Lord ...*already had in mind what he was going to do.* Learn to trust Jesus!

Without explanation, *Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." ... Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets ... After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world."* I often wondered: What did this look like? Did the two small fish suddenly turn into a massive pile of broiled fish before their very eyes? Did they place the five loaves into a basket that over-flowed and never emptied? The Bible doesn't say. The fact is, however, that everyone had more than enough to eat.

What a lesson! And what did they all take away from this awesome miracle? The Bible says: ... *they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world."* By God's grace we have already learned that lesson concerning Jesus. We know, believe and confess that Jesus is the almighty Son of God who has come into this world to redeem us from sin, death and the devil. Through Jesus we have forgiveness of sins, and where there is forgiveness of sins there is life and salvation. Jesus has made us Children of his Heavenly Father. The Bible says: *Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid."* He 13 Do you believe this? Then you know that every morning when you get up, you can expect such loving attention. Now and then He will test you in order to strengthen your faith. It will be a test that causes you to lose all hope in yourself and your fellow man. Compared to tests like what was given to Abraham, Job, or other great Christians, it will still be a test allows only for one hope: that the Lord who loves you already has in mind what goodness he is going to work for you in this life and for your eternal life with him in heaven.

What a lesson! And what a parallel we have in the miracle that will soon take place right before us in the Lord's Supper we are about to eat! The first time Jesus distributed the Lord's Supper, it was before the eyes of these same disciples who had witnessed this Feeding of the Five Thousand. On that last Passover the night before Jesus would die for the sins of the world, He gave them bread and wine and said, *"This is my body; this is my blood..."* None of them would doubt for a moment that the One who multiplied the loaves and fishes

could also give them His actual body and blood, in, with and under the bread and wine they would eat and drink that evening. They had seen enough to trust **WHATEVER** this Jesus would say to them.

And so shall we! This same Jesus comes to us today, in, with and under the bread and wine we shall soon eat and drink. But this is not to satisfy our bodily hunger so that we don't faint on our way back home, but for the personal forgiveness of our sins! And if you are such a disciple of Jesus that you are invited to eat and drink His body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins, are you not also a disciple that is the object of His personal attention with **ALL** the promises written in Scripture for us to know and to believe?

Read those promises and learn to believe them completely! You will not be disappointed, for when the Lord blesses you with "fun tests" like the one we studied today, your faith will be strengthened. Amen.