

Mark 6:30-44

We do not know why James Eagan Holmes opened fire in a movie theater packed with people early Friday morning. And we may never know. But we do know whose spirit was in him. The devil desires only to destroy that which God has made, and to bring to ruin those for whom Christ died. That young man from Aurora, Colorado was being led by Satan as he did his murderous work. One can only imagine what he would have done had he encountered a crowd such as the one in our text...five thousand men, plus women and children.

How different is God in how He thinks and acts! When Jesus saw the crowd, He *“had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.”* And so even though He, with His disciples, had gone away into a desolate place to rest, out of compassion, Jesus spent the day giving them the Word of God. And then evening came. Now the disciples were not of the same mind as James Holmes, but they did not have much compassion. *“Send (the people) away,”* they told Jesus. *“(Let them) go into the surrounding countryside and villages to buy themselves something to eat.”* But Jesus would not hear of it. From His lips came words of compassion, *“You give them something to eat.”* God is always ready to give. Satan takes. He takes away whatever he can. But God gives. And on this day, after giving the Word of Life into their ears, He gives food into their mouths.

If you follow the history of God’s people, you can see that same pattern repeating itself. Beginning in the Garden of Eden, Satan took away innocence and life itself. But God restored what the devil took by giving the promise of the Savior. When Satan took away freedom and hope, God gave Moses to His people bringing them out of their slavery into the land of promise. When Satan kept taking from God’s people by afflicting them with enemies on all sides, God restored them by giving them Judges--Gideon, Samson, and others. And when Satan took God’s people away into captivity, after seventy years God gave them their home again by bringing them back. So when Jesus gave food for the soul and then food for the body to the great mass of people in that desolate place, He was simply doing what God always does--having compassion.

Through the drought that we, along with much of the country, have experienced, Satan delights in taking from us--taking hope from some, taking away a harvest from another. But God gives. Today you are in His house where He reminds you, *“Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”* And His Word gives you His promise that He will not abandon you. Even when there is no rain, His mercy still rains down on you. He will provide all that you need. He will sustain you through the time of trouble. Today He gives you His words, as He did to the five thousand. And as He had compassion on them by giving them food for the body as well, so He will send rain in due time, for He also has compassion on you.

Through wicked men like James Holmes, Satan takes from people even their life. But he acts in ways even more devious. Through false preachers like Joel Osteen, and others like him who twist and turn the Word of God and so preach themselves and not Christ crucified, Satan takes faith, and salvation, and Christ, and eternal life away from people. And it is far worse to kill the soul than to kill the body. It is sad when the devil takes away life, but it is a tragedy when he robs sinners of Holy Baptism, when he turns sinners away from Jesus to trust in their own good works, when he destroys the Sacrament of the Altar for many by removing Christ and faith from it through false preachers, when he refuses to allow such preachers to absolve the sins of their people.

But God has compassion on you. He has preserved for you the truth of His Word. He, through His called servants, warns you, through His word of Law, to repent of your sins and turn from your

wickedness lest you perish with all the heathen. He gives you His Gospel so that, repenting of your sins, He absolves your sins and assures you of eternal life in Christ Jesus. As Jesus used His disciples to carry food to the five thousand, so for you He uses the servant of the Word to carry to you what you need. As He multiplied the bread and fish for the people, so He multiplies His blessings to you by giving you Bread from Heaven--His own flesh and blood. Out of compassion He will not, as the twelve disciples were urging, have you go out from His presence and attempt to buy for yourselves that which you need to live before God. Instead, He gives to you as He gave to them. There were only five loaves and two fish, but they were enough. With that meager amount of food, Jesus fed all the thousands that were there, and everyone *"ate and was satisfied."*

Jesus has placed you into a congregation which is not large by human standards. We do not have program after program for every possible age group under the sun. But we have five loaves and two fish here. We have faithful members who come and who give. We have the Word of God in all its truth and purity. We have water for Holy Baptism. We have bread and wine for Holy Communion. We have the Gospel in all of its forms. And it is enough. Jesus takes what we have--what He Himself has given us--and He feeds those who are hungry. And those who hunger will come, will eat, and will be satisfied. Your satisfaction does not come from what you do for God, but in what He gives to you.

It would have been good had you been able to come up here today and be satisfied with the Bread of Life being given into your mouth. It just does not seem right to have this text before us, where Jesus feeds the five thousand, but we here are not hungry enough to eat from Christ's hand at His altar as they did. But I will give you what I can today, and you will be satisfied--those of you who are hungry. Your sins are forgiven. You may not see yourself as someone like James Holmes, but the same sin that lives in him lives in you and me. Christ died for every sinner, even for James. And He died for you. And His death satisfied the Heavenly Father on your behalf so that God charges no sin to your account. Your debt was paid in full on the cross by Jesus. You, my fellow sinner, are completely forgiven.

The James Holmes' of the world can rob you of life and liberty. The drought can rob you of an external happiness. Satan can take everything from you but this--you have a Savior in Jesus. He is a Savior who gives. He gave Himself for you on the cross. He gives Himself to you here in the Word and in the Sacraments. What you have from Him is His promise that you are forgiven and that life and salvation are yours in Him, because to you He shows compassion. Amen.