

“God Is Divinely Good”

Text: Exodus 16:2-21

March 14, 2021

You ever notice how relevant the Small Catechism is? If you haven't, get it out and take another look at it. Pretty much anything and everything you need to know about God and what He thinks of you is in the Small Catechism. People often ask me if I can recommend to them a devotional aid or prayer book for daily use, and I usually direct them to the Catechism. If you just make a habit of daily / monthly / yearly reading through the Small Catechism, you'll know everything you need to know about God and His Word.

We see that from today's Scripture lessons, especially our O.T. and Gospel lessons for today. Those lessons teach something we see expressed in Luther's explanation of the 1st Article of the Creed, where he writes that all that God does for us He does purely:

“... out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me.”

God is divinely good, the Catechism says. We see that clearly from today's O.T. Lesson, to which we now turn our attention ...

We begin by taking note of the fact that we find ourselves, in today's O.T. Lesson, in the same book of Scripture we found ourselves in last week's O.T. Lesson: the book of Exodus. We've been hearing somewhat frequently from Exodus in our readings here in church these past several weeks: On the first Sunday of pre-Lent – the Sunday known as Septuagesima, we heard from Ex. 17's story of Israel's complaining of thirst while journeying to Mt. Sinai; and last week we heard from Ex. 8's story of two of the plagues of Egypt, plagues by which God worked to free Israel from slavery in Egypt. This week is Ex. 16's story of Israel's complaining of hunger, as Exodus says that:

“... the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, ...” [they said] “... Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” (Exodus 16:2, 3)

There are two things that jump out at us when we hear those words: 1) Israel was *ungrateful* and therefore *undeserving* of being God's people. They even reminisced about their days of slavery in Egypt as if they had been on vacation there in some exotic resort. 2) Israel didn't know the LORD very well. In fact, they seemed to think that He had tricked them in rescuing them from Egypt, as if He'd lured them out into the wilderness only to kill them with hunger. Israel failed to take to heart all that God had done to free them for life as His people.

In response to that, what did the LORD do? Well, Exodus goes on to say that:

“The LORD said to Moses: ‘Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day, ... At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.’” (vs.4a, 12)

Exodus goes on to describe how that happened, that in the evening, at dusk:

“... quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp. And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground ... And Moses said to them: ‘It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat.’” (vs. 13-14, 15b)

Isn’t that amazing? Israel had seen the LORD work plagues on an entire country (Egypt), bringing it to its knees. Israel had seen the LORD part the waters of a sea, making a way for them through the middle of it on dry ground. Israel saw the LORD leave their enemies behind them, drowned in the sea. And yet, at the first sign of trouble – at the first sign of hunger – they complained about not having food, even wondering why the LORD hadn’t just gone ahead and killed them back in Egypt. How *ungrateful* could they be?! How *unbelieving*!

And yet what did the LORD do? *He provided for them further* – giving them meat to eat in the evening (in the form of quail), and bread to eat in the morning (which they called manna). Talk about the goodness of God – to continue being good to a people who could only complain that the things He gave them weren’t good enough! God was divinely good, which is to say that He was good in a way that only God can be. He’s certainly better than the goodness of us sinners.

God was divinely good to Israel, as Exodus tells us that:

“Each of them gathered as much as he could eat.” (v.18b)

God was *abundantly* good to Israel, even though they did NOT deserve it. And that became the pattern for God and His people – a pattern that continued throughout the O.T. In fact, in the story of Moses & Israel, the people had already shown that they did NOT deserve what God did for them, as trapped by the banks of the Red Sea they had cried out:

“Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness?” (14:11)

We mentioned earlier the O.T. Reading for pre-Lent #1; well in that day’s Exodus 17 reading Israel grew thirsty on her journey and complained:

“Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?” (v.3)

Later on in the book of Numbers, after Israel set out from Mt. Sinai, they complained again:

“Who will give us meat to eat? We remember the fish which we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and

the garlic, but now our appetite is gone. There is nothing at all to look at except this manna.” (vs. 4-6)

On and on at every turn Israel was *ungrateful* for the LORD’s provision, and on and on at every turn the LORD continued providing for them.

And it’s no different today – people are often *ungrateful* and therefore *undeserving* of what God gives. And what does God do? He gives more! We grumble and complain about God’s provision, only to have Him continue providing everything we need. True, it may not always be what we *want*, but when was the last time you did without something you *needed*? Have you always been grateful for that? Probably not. And yet God always provides. God provides for His people, even though they/we do NOT deserve it. As Luther writes in the Small Catechism, God does all that He does for us:

“... out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me.”

God is divinely good to us all.

Nowhere was that more the case than on the cross of His Son: Jesus Christ. There God provided not only physical sustenance for His people, but *spiritual sustenance* for ALL *undeserving* people everywhere. As St. Paul writes in his letter to the Romans: “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (5:8). We see that hinted at in the story of Moses & Israel, as God made a way for His people to be forgiven of their ungratefulness through the blood of bulls and goats (see Ex. 24).

When we read in the 6th chapter of John’s Gospel – from which today’s Gospel comes to us – we see that Jesus’ blood is the *true* blood that the blood of the “old” covenant always pointed forward to. And the same goes for the bread from heaven (the manna) with which God fed Israel in the wilderness. In fact, Jesus even compares Himself to the bread the Israelites fed on in Exodus, saying:

“I am the living Bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this Bread he will live forever; and the Bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh ... He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the Last Day.” (vs. 51, 54)

Those words show clearly that, as God once fed His people ‘of old’ with bread *from* heaven, God still feeds His people today with *the* Bread *of* heaven: the Body of His Son. That Body, that was once given *for* us on a cross, has been raised to be given *to* us on an altar, for the forgiveness of our sins. As we eat of it again today, we see that God *truly* gives us *undeserving* sinners *everything* we need; we see that He is truly divinely good.

Which brings us back to where we began, where we mentioned that everything we need to know about God we find in the Small Catechism. What we need to know about God is that, in spite of our NOT deserving it, He gives to us all that we need. That message – the message of a God Who gives – permeates every part of the Catechism. The message of the Catechism is the same as the message of the book of Exodus, which tells us today that, in spite of Israel’s complaining:

“Each of them gathered as much as [they] could eat.” (v.18b)

As we enjoy the gifts God gives, and then weekly come here to eat the Bread of heaven that is the Body of His Son – a Body once given into death for our every sin, and then raised from the dead that we might live off it forever – we too gather as much as we can eat. As we do, we’re thankful for a God Who provides even for those who do NOT deserve it; we’re thankful for a God Who is divinely good –

– in Jesus’ ✠ Name,
Amen!