

## Sermon for Thanksgiving

Sermon Text: Mark 8:1-9



*In those days, when again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat, He called His disciples to Him and said to them, <sup>2</sup> "I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. <sup>3</sup> And if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way. And some of them have come from far away." <sup>4</sup> And His disciples answered Him, "How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?" <sup>5</sup> And He asked them, "How many loaves do you have?" They said, "Seven." <sup>6</sup> And He directed the crowd to sit down on the ground. And He took the seven loaves, and having given thanks, He broke them and gave them to His disciples to set before the people; and they set them before the crowd. <sup>7</sup> And they had a few small fish. And having blessed them, He said that these also should be set before them. <sup>8</sup> And they ate and were satisfied. And they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. <sup>9</sup> And there were about four thousand people. And He sent them away.*

Her father was a truck driver, her mother was unemployed. Rosa's family of five struggled to survive on her father's small income. Nevertheless, they invited the children of their neighbor, who were from a Brazilian slum, to eat with them. These children had nothing to eat. And so, they sat together around the table. The emaciated Nida and her brother, together with Rosa and her family. They held hands and spoke a heartfelt prayer of thanks. Thank you, God, for watching over and providing for us! And then they shared what little they had with one another.

The aforementioned description is a heartbreaking scene that is happening in many countries of the world. People in extreme poverty who still share the little that they have and can even give thanks for it. We have come together today to give thanks. Because today we celebrate Thanksgiving! Here in Germany, there are also many people who must fight so that they can provide for their families. In one way or another, we could all experience in this Corona year how it is when there's no longer enough there. Where once you could go shopping without any worry, you had to stand in a long line and then here and there, empty shelves could be seen. We couldn't buy everything that we wanted anymore. Since then, the shelves have been refilled and it seems that the worst did not happen. There was and still is enough to eat. We didn't have to go hungry. First of all, for that, we can say thank you! And yet the worries remained. The economic worries and the fear for the future of our world remained; concern for refugees who can't find a home; worries about if I can stay in Europe as a refugee; if I can successfully complete the language course or if I can learn a trade and build a future. Many have long

since given up hope of such a future. What do we do in such a hopeless situation? Should we suppress all our tears and simply give thanks contrary to our feelings? Definitely not! God doesn't expect us to be dishonest. In the Psalms, there are many people who bring their needs to God. It is still possible that we also feel deeply grateful in times of need. And this thankfulness can give us wings so that we can overcome the crises in our lives.

That's why today's sermon text takes us into an emergency situation that Jesus experienced with His disciples. Many people were following Jesus at that time. Some had come from very far away and didn't have enough food with them. That meant that they also now had a long way to go back home.... and that without food. Who knows if some might have starved to death on the way back home. Jesus realizes this crisis situation and He laments over it! Jesus feels compassion in this crisis! And He doesn't just feel compassion! He consults with His disciples. He involves them and wants to see what ideas they have. Together with His disciples, Jesus made a brief analysis of the situation. What do we have here to satisfy hunger? What they place before Jesus' feet is pitifully little. Seven loaves and some fish! That's a situation to really cry about. How can you satisfy 4,000 people with so little? But Jesus was in the middle! Jesus stood directly between the need of the people and the living God who made everything! When we celebrate Thanksgiving, we do exactly that. We bring everything that we have before God. Our job, our house, our family, the benefits we receive from the government. Everything that we are and have comes from God the Creator. In His unending wisdom, He gives us exactly what we need. The God who made everything also knows about our wants and needs! Everything is in His hand. It is His will that we humans live together in harmony with the animals and the environment. It is not God's will that we experience need and suffering. It is not God's will that the world is steadily destroyed, and it is not God's will that a few should possess the greatest portion of the world while others must starve. But we know that sin has made a deep rift between God and us. Want and famine originate from this very sin.

And Jesus places Himself in the middle. Jesus is between God and all our need. And He does something very strange! He takes that which seems little and inconsequential to us and elevates it! Even the few loaves of bread and the few fish are there so that we can live! In the face of great need, Jesus sees that small gift and can give thanks for it! In this, there is a precious secret. If the power goes out for just an hour, you'd think a catastrophe occurred. All the neighbors send messages around wildly: I have no internet! What do I do now!?! I was in the middle of doing laundry! And I had a cake in the oven! When we experience any kind of shortage in any part of our lives, then it becomes a major problem that embitters our whole life! Instead, we can open the framework of our own existence and see God in the middle! He is the one who gives us everything! He is also the one who knows even the deepest affliction! He also knows our needs and doesn't let a hair from our heads fall without knowing about it. This knowledge that God is there sets us free! And then we can see the many things that God gives us so naturally already! Perhaps we should again learn to say thank you for the small things! Thank you that I am healthy! Thank you that my family is healthy! Thank you that we don't have to experience a war! I know you can't order anyone to be thankful. It doesn't work that way. And I don't think Jesus wants to order us to be thankful! In the story that we heard today, He doesn't scold His disciples that they should say thank you for the seven loaves and few fish! No, Jesus must do that Himself! Jesus places Himself in the middle. He also places Himself in the middle where we don't feel the feeling of thankfulness. Thankfulness radiates from Jesus. Not from us! From Jesus and His power, even the smallest gift becomes very much and very important. The words that Jesus prayed at the time over the bread and

fish are almost the same that He would use at the Lord's Supper. At the Lord's Supper, Jesus again took some bread, gave thanks and broke it and then He said something amazing: "This is my body!" And then He also took the cup, gave thanks, and said: "This is my blood!" How can a little piece of bread and a small sip of wine make a difference? Of course, when I have such a loaf of bread and such a sip of wine at home, not much can happen. But Jesus is in the middle. It is His Word that makes the difference. When Jesus is there, everything is different. That's why I am of the firm belief that this little family from a Brazilian slum that I spoke about at the beginning, experienced no want. Not when Jesus is in the middle—then they are richer than so many others who live in abundance. Amen.