



When a pastor receives a Call, this is when faith gets tested that God will provide for His people no matter what. We do not know the plans God has for this particular congregation, and every time a Divine Call is issued, we are humbly reminded that we are not the ones in control of anything pertaining to the Church. The Church is Christ's Church just as pastors are Christ's pastors. We do confess this every week in the Creed, "I believe in ONE holy, Christian and apostolic Church!"

Now, I repent for saying in Bible Study publicly and to some of you privately, "How many Calls do I have to *decline* before you trust me that I love you and I'm here for the long haul?" While of course I intended it to be a matter of trust between pastor and parishioner, I was in a very real way setting myself up as an idol. Instead, the question should be, "How many Calls do I have to *receive* before you trust the *LORD* that *HE* loves you and He is here for you for the long haul?" I hope you see the difference. Christ will provide no matter what happens ever!

The perpetual love of Christ, the God-man, is what drives the compassion He has for the people when seeing that they have had nothing to eat (**Mk 8:2**). In the same way, the perpetual love of Christ, the God-man, is what drives His compassion to provide for His Church when, or if, they find themselves without a pastor. It is the nature of God to provide all things, for both body and soul. God will provide pastors when and where He sees fit. God opens Churches and He closes them when and where He sees fit. He moves the pieces. He knows what He's doing. **Isaiah 55:8, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD."** We are His servants. Think of the book of Job for a minute. For 37 chapters, Job and his so-called friends dispute God's will, and Job questions God's justice. Rather than answering Job's multitude of questions, when God finally decides to speak He says these words, "**Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? <sup>3</sup> Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me. <sup>4</sup> "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding" (Job 38:1-24).**

God is the Shepherd. We are the sheep. In this past year, I have heard this insult thrown around a lot, that those who follow this or that authority, or this or that viewpoint are just "sheeple" (sheep + people). Most people understand that sheep aren't very intelligent and just sort of "follow the flock" as it were. Here's the problem with such an insult. Everyone is a sheep, whether you like it or not, and there are no exceptions. What matters, then, is, "Who is your shepherd?" Is it Christ or some other authority? Is it Christ? Or have you set yourself up as your own shepherd?

Paul acknowledges our human weaknesses in the Epistle reading today when he writes, "**I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations" (Rom 6:19)**. We all have weaknesses, blind spots, and natural limitations. We can either conform to the ways of the world or we can conform to Christ, the "**Shepherd and overseer of our souls" (1 Pet 2:25)**. It is the nature of the world to be corrupt, selfish, controlling, and deceitful. As Paul writes in the Epistle, "**The end of those things is death" (Rom 6:21)**. It is the nature of Christ, however, to provide, have compassion, nurture, strengthen, and sustain body and soul unto life everlasting. Jesus is the "Highest Good", which is why we sang such praises to Him in the sermon hymn (LSB #819). Because of Jesus, "**you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life" (Rom 6:22)**.

God is going to provide for you all the days of your life, and He's going to provide everything you need for both body and soul. It may not come in a miraculous way like the feeding of the four thousand. Faith never has its foundation in that kind of miracle anyways. Instead, faith has its foundation in Christ, who died and rose again; who continues to give us His body and blood under the bread and wine for the forgiveness of sins.

In humility and repentance, this is why we come to the Divine Service week after week and receive the gracious provisions God gives through Word and Sacrament. It is His nature to provide and give, which is precisely what we need since it is our sinful nature to despise the gifts. It's why men like you, Vicar, are needed to faithfully proclaim the Word of God, which alone can shatter hardened hearts and yet also mend broken ones. So, like God said to Job, "Dress for action like a man", that is, to translate it literally, "**Gird up your loins" (Job 38:3)**. Gird 'em up, that by God's grace you may in boldness and confidence be the man through whom God provides the forgiveness of sins in Word and Sacrament, received by faith alone. And trust that indeed it is the nature of God to provide. And we will be satisfied. The word "satisfied" in Greek is a coarse verb that is almost always used of livestock being to the fullest. Think of the phrase, "stuffed like a pig." The Shepherd leads His sheep to pasture and feeds us to the fullest. In Jesus' name, Amen.