**Texts: Ezekiel 17:22-24, Mark 4:26-34**

How Much is Enough?

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. When you think of food, what is the first thing that comes into mind? For me, when someone mentions the word food, the first image that pops into my head is a cheeseburger. When you think about it, a cheeseburger is the true American culinary pastime. In fact it is true that the hamburger is the most popular sandwich in the United States as we Americans eat nearly 50 Billion, with a B, hamburgers every year. That translates into 3 burgers every week for each individual in the US. In fact, hamburgers account for 40% of all sandwiches sold and account for nearly 70% of beef served in commercial restaurants. There is even an economic index called the Big Mac Index, which can compare the purchasing power of two different currencies like the dollar vs. the euro or the British pound. Why is it that hamburgers are so popular? Not only do they taste amazing, in my opinion there is no better food on earth than a burger cooked to perfection, but they contain some of the most inexpensive ingredients that you can find. The fact that, according to McDonalds, they sell 75 burgers every second of minute of every day speaks to this. It is a high calorie sandwich that can be very inexpensive to purchase or cook up yourself. Think about the first hamburger you ever had. Can you even remember when it was? I sure can’t. Who here has never eaten a hamburger raise your hands. Now who here has eaten caviar before? For how inexpensive hamburgers are, caviar is the exact opposite. You could go to McDonalds and purchase a quarter pound hamburger for $3.79. That is 4 ounces of beef at a price of $0.95 an ounce. Now if you go to Amazon and look for Sturgeon Caviar you’ll find that it is far more expensive. In fact, you’ll find it ranging in price from $33.00 an ounce all the way up to almost $200.00 an ounce. This makes it more of a delicacy rather than just any other food. You wouldn’t pull out the caviar for your kid’s sleepover or a neighborhood barbeque. No that would be reserved for special company. I don’t even know if I would eat it at all actually. Given how expensive it is, I would feel as though I was wasting my money by simply eating it. Yet there are people out there who can afford to eat it. There are people who do not feel as though it is a waste of money to spend over 100$ for an ounce of raw fish eggs. It seems as though this type of lifestyle, this level of opulence, always begs the question, “How much is too much?”

Do we ask ourselves this question enough? I’m not certain. I don’t know if we, in this country, take a hard-enough look at our decisions to determine the answer to this question. After all we live in a country where having too much is the norm. Yet this is not something new. The American dream itself was built around the idea of excess. It wasn’t built around having just enough resources to scrape by. It was established as the idea that, through hard work and determination, you could have everything you’ve ever wanted. We certainly tend to see the American dream lived out by people like Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Ray Kroc, professional athletes, and a litany of others. People like this provide motivation and inspiration that if a college dropout can become one of the richest people on earth, there is very little standing in the way of our dreams but ourselves. But have we ever stopped, in our pursuit of the American dream, to ask ourselves, “How much is too much?” I know that is a strange question to be asking yourself, and perhaps it is a very difficult one for some of you to answer. Yet we live in a nation where the number one health problem isn’t a disease or lack of resources. In fact, our number one health issue comes from the fact that we have too much. The top 4 health issues that pertain to Americans, according to cancer.org, are heart disease, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol levels. These aren’t issues that come from not having enough, no these are issues that come from having too much. Yet constantly, despite the fact that we have too much, we always are wanting for more. What’s interesting is that when it comes to the wants and desires of the heart, we never have enough. The answer to our question is never found, because we are always left unsatisfied. Yet when it comes to our faith in God, we seem to constantly be asking ourselves, “How much is too much?” Because after all, we don’t want to come across as those crazy religious fundamental types, right? You know the ones, the people who picket and scream and make a scene proclaiming that for all your sins you will be damned to hell and there is nothing you can do about it. Now I will say, that those people tend to take it too far. They tend to go overboard because they are obsessed with your sin and your condemnation, not with the grace and mercy that God shows us through Christ Jesus. In fact, these people almost never speak of Jesus. We don’t want to be those people, so we constantly have to ask ourselves, “how much is too much?” in order that we don’t cross that line. We certainly ask this question of God, because we are never satisfied with what we are given. How much is too much from God? We’ll never know, because we are constantly wanting more and more. We are constantly finding ourselves saying that “This isn’t good enough! I need more I need more!” This is our selfish nature. This is our sin. We become blinded by our own lives on earth that we never stop to ponder whether or not we actually should be satisfied with what we have. But do we ever reverse the question? Do we ask, “How much time away from church is too much?” Do we ever seriously ponder that question? How much time away from God’s Word is too much? How much time away from His presence, His sacraments, His forgiveness is too much? An hour? A day? A week, month, year? The answer to that is yes. For without hearing the Word of God, without being in His presence, without nurturing our faith, we fall into despair. Because without those gifts from God, we are lost. We are searching and distraught. Without the gifts of God, without hearing the good news of Christ crucified and risen from the dead, we are living, as St. Paul says, by sight. We are living through our emotions, our wants and our desires. We are thinking of short term satisfaction instead of long term salvation.

Do you think when it comes to granting us forgiveness, that God ever asks himself, “How much forgiveness is too much for one person?” Certainly not! What a bleak and horrible thing that would be! Do you think, that when it comes to granting us our daily bread, that which we need to sustain our lives spiritually and physically, that God ever asks himself if He’s given us too much? How much do you think it would take for God to turn His face from us, His baptized and believing children? St. Paul tells us, “**For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**” God does not seek to separate himself from us. When He seems distant and far off, maybe we need to take a look in the mirror. Most often, when we feel as though God has betrayed us it is a trick that is played on our minds. For our wicked foe is constantly seeking to sow the seeds of doubt in our minds and in our hearts. Sometimes, when it seems as though God has not given us enough, we need to re-evaluate our situation. The people of Israel found themselves in this position during the time of the prophet Ezekiel. At this time, the nation of Israel, God’s chosen people, were in exile. They had been conquered by the Babylonians because they had abandoned God’s commandments and broken His covenant. Yet God has not left them, for during their exile he sends the prophets of Ezekiel and Daniel to continue to speak God’s message to Israel. Our Old Testament lesson for today shows us, that despite the fact these people were being punished, God would in fact re-establish the salvation He promised them, “**I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and will set it out. I will break off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. On the mountain height of Israel will I plant it, that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar.**” These short couple of verses show us so much. God gives us what we need. We spend so much time wondering whether or not we will have enough or too much, that we sometimes forget to ask how much we need. How much from God do we need? How much is enough? Jesus tells us, “**With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.**” God gives us that which we need, even when we don’t realize it. God gives us what we need, that which may seem to us as small as a grain of mustard seed. It may seem miniscule to us, to come here to God’s house, the place where the Holy Spirit is given through baptism, the place where forgiveness of sins is freely offered. These may seem like ritual to us, but it is so much more. Our worship is something we should cherish, for it is through our worship that we come to recognize ourselves for who we are. We are those, saved from eternal separation from God, through the burden of our sin placed on the shoulders of Jesus. How much sin is too much for Jesus to take? There is no limit. For He died for the sins of all humanity from the beginning of time to the end. We also come here to receive the grain of the knowledge of Christ’s victory over death. Through the mustard seed of the knowledge of Christ, we are able to grow in our faith. When we nurture that faith, it grows even faster. It grows even bolder. When we nurture the seed of our faith, there is no answer to “How much time with God is too much?” for we realize that there is no such thing. So, take heart my friends, for our God has seen fit to grant us what we need. For there will never be such a thing as too much grace and mercy from our heavenly Father. Amen. Now may the peace of God which surpasses our understanding keep and guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus now and forever. Amen.