

Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them.p And how much more valuable you are than birds!

My brothers and my sisters in Christ Jesus. The hottest restaurant in France is perhaps not what you might expect from a place that known for snooty cuisine. It's located in a small southern town of Narbonne inside of a Rec. center next to a 5 story waterslide. But, last year, more than 380,000 people ate there, and brought in 24 million euros of revenue, the highest grossing in France. It's a place called *Les Grands Buffet*, and it is an all you can eat buffet. But this is not just any buffet. For 52 Euros you can have all you can eat of all the finest French traditional dishes you can stomach: from the 9 kinds of foie gras, 111 varieties of French Cheese, stuffed quail, caviar, and more. The restaurant prides itself on providing the most and best that French dining has to offer to all of their patrons. All who enter there are fed to full, all are granted seamless service, all are entertained.

This fanciest of buffets could be seen as a loose metaphor for God's continued work in our world. Last week, we spoke about creation, how God called into being with precision, deliberately the world and the universe itself, including you. This week we move to the next phase of creation, which we call, "Preservation". If the building of *Les Grands Buffet* is creation, then preservation is the continued operation of the restaurant: providing food, service, safety, regularity, and order to the patrons. God made the universe, but he didn't just leave it and walk away, but he also continues to be involved in everything that happens. Feeding, protecting, sustaining, moving, ordering, etc.

And Scripture tells us directly that without God doing this, everything would collapse. Imagine that restaurant with no employees, no schedule, no cleaners, no food delivery and maintenance, so much more for the entirety of the universe. This preservation is a constant working of God, willing of existence, sustaining and permeating everything and anything with his omnipotence and omnipresence. Paul declares pointedly: **"Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else."**

Surprisingly, this could be a disagreeable doctrine for many of us. Why is that? Well, first of all, we tend to be very self righteous. All the things that work well in my life, who always gets the first credit? Usually ourselves. We are proud of what we have done. The food we have provided for our families. The health we have worked hard to maintain. The position we have in our jobs and the respect we have toiled to be seen in. That's my contributions, my nose on the grindstone, my sacrifices, my intelligence. I mean Exodus is an example of preservation, I haven't seen anything like that. I mean God

didn't rain down food from heaven on my dinner table. God didn't manifest my job like quail from the sky.

And furthermore, in the grand scale of things, there's quite a bit of things that God doesn't quite seem to have a handle on. I mean there are plenty of unforeseen disasters that disassemble good order. There is always some bump in the road. Things break. There's always just something else I really need but don't have. There's always something in nature that's not working like it is supposed to be. If preservation is God's buffet, then it seems that I'm the one making my own food, and the tables are missing legs, and there's no butter in the fridge.

However, our foolish thoughts are quickly dispersed under an examination of the grand perspective of God's work. The first being: How God preserves. God doesn't promise to preserve us through the things that are unrestrained shows of power and miracles. God does promise to preserve us to us through things that we so regularly take for granted that just work. In the buffet, you don't think about the trucks of fresh food that come in every single morning, or the crew that keeps the stoves running like new, but they always do.

God cares for and preserves his creation through the laws that he has created and continues to sustain without us ever even considering, but are always there. God sustains us, by the orderly orbit of the earth, giving day and night. He guides the predictable changing of the seasons. We can and do depend on that, that's God's power, that's God's preservation. God feeds us, by plants going to seed and those seeds produce the same kind as they came from, as they always have. The animals give birth to more of their kind, healthy and well. That's God's power. That's God's preservation. God protects us, by medicines crafted by scientists, he keeps us comfortable by ingenuity of entrepreneurs. That's God at doing. That's God's preservation.

But the wonder of God's love is not only evident in how he does it, but also who he does it for. God is keenly aware and involved in the life of every single creature and living things of this world: **"Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these."** God has a special concern for all things. Even the things we consider unimportant, or even worthy of contempt. Every sparrow, every leaf, every grubby little worm in the ground. All are fed, nourished, and cared for.

Les Grands Buffet this happens because the owner knows down to the gram how much to prepare for each diner. God in his perfect wisdom knows

exactly what is needed for every single living thing in this universe and orchestrates to provide it.

Jesus encourages us to trust in his preservation of ourselves by calling to mind this fact. The ravens, without any sort of preplanning or career plans, through the laws of nature and his care, never go hungry. The flowers do not toil, yet God provide a beautiful dress to adorn them. The grass, with no mental capacity at all, grows and reproduces. If God does this for these helpless insignificant things, how much more can we trust in his care for us?

This is even more marvelous to consider when we think of humans, with all of our flaws. Take for example happens in the wilderness with Israel. The whole Israelite community grumbled against God, because he wasn't taking care of them. And God, even though he is taken for granted and grumbled against, what does he do? **"The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little."** Even those ungrateful, finicky Israelites, God did not stop caring for them. By means of a miracle, he brings forth a sea of quail and manna for them. In the middle of a wilderness, enough food is granted for all of his people. Not quite a buffet of endless creme brûlée, but millions are constantly fed and nourished.

But most marvelous thing about God's preservation, is not in the wonder of his power to form and uphold the laws of nature. It is not the bewilderment of every living creature big and small being seen and cared for. The most unparalleled beauty comes from why God does this: **"your Fathers knows that you need them."**

God does all this, for every creature, but especially for you, simply because he loves you. Not for profit. Not for praise. Not for repayment. He sees that you are someone who needs things: clothing, food, shelter, income, relationships. And simply because he knows that you require them, and because he loves you, he provides them for you. He provides them for you through your abilities, through the dependability of his creation, through he gentle pushes of time and space, to provide and keep you. "All this God does only because he is my good and merciful Father in heaven, and not because I have earned or deserved it."

If you are interested in dining at the *Les Grands Buffet*, the current waiting list is 9 months into the future. There is a strict dress code, and the price of entry indisputable. But at God's Bountiful Banquet of preservation. No such hindrances exist. Every single day, God upholds the order of the cosmos so creatures are cared for. Every single thing from the most majestic bird in jungle, to the simple ladybug in your garden, is provided for with God's

knowledge. Every single individual, well known or easily forgotten, including you, God sees and takes special concern to sustain you. Why? Because he sees you, and he loves you. That love will never cease, and neither will his care. Amen.