

## Celebration Sunday 2017 – Growing in our concern for the lost

Mark 6.30-45

### Part One

It's possible that, apart from the Resurrection,  
this is *the most* significant miracle in the Bible.  
Let me explain what I mean.

With the exception of the resurrection,  
this is the only miracle to be recorded in all four gospels.  
Did you know that?  
Out of the 39 separate miracles of Jesus that we have recorded,  
the feeding of the 5000 is the only one to make it into all four gospels.  
This suggests to me that this is a defining event,  
that this was one of they *key stories* drawn upon by the early church.

It's intriguing to think about what this story is meant to communicate.  
What is the message behind this remarkable story,  
a story *so central* that each gospel writer wanted to relay it?

It's a key moment that does at least two things:  
Of course, as you would expect of such a central story,  
it sheds light on the person of Jesus - who he is and what he came to do;  
But it also sheds light on the role of the Apostles.  
And given we are an *apostolic church*,  
a church built not only on Christ but on the 12 who helped him,  
then the story says something to us as well.

So what are we told?

Let's look at the text. Mark ch6 v30.

I'd like us to notice the geographic setting first of all.

<sup>30</sup>The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. <sup>31</sup>Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." <sup>32</sup>So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.

Many of us have experience attending professional development days,  
And in my experience, passages like this feature quite heavily  
when ministers attend their professional development.  
We are often told to imitate Christ's example and seek out periods of rest.  
Of course that is incredibly wise and sound advice,  
however I'm not sure that principle exhausts the significance of these verses.

Rather it seems to me that what's important is the setting in "a solitary place".  
When you read through the rest of the Bible  
you discover that important things happen in the wilderness.

The Israelites spent 40 years in the wilderness,  
the wilderness is the place where Moses taught the Israelites,  
the wilderness is the place where miracles happened.

So the significance here is not so much that Jesus is giving us an example of self-care,  
Rather Mark is telling us to expect something important to happen,  
and so we read on...

v33 But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. <sup>34</sup>When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them,

It's no surprise that Jesus is described as compassionate,  
but what might be new for us is *why* he felt these people were in need.  
Mark tells us it's because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

*"Like sheep without a shepherd"*

It's a familiar phrase, describing lost people as *sheep without a shepherd*  
However Jesus wasn't the first to use it.  
It's a phrase that we see used first of all in the OT,  
In Numbers ch 27, Moses pleads with God to not let Israel  
be like sheep without a shepherd after he is gone.  
And so God says "*Ok, Joshua will replace you*"  
And then throughout the OT the shepherd image is used  
to describe the role of Israel's leaders.

So Jesus is saying that the people of his time are leaderless,  
that's why he has compassion on them you see.  
His compassion is enflamed *not only* because they are hungry,  
but also because they're without caring leaders.

What were the leaders of his time like?

Well, you have the *Pharisees* who assumed leadership and direction of God's people.  
They are condemned by Jesus because they distort the law of God by adding to it.  
So in leadership terms the Pharisees are a bit like a harsh boss  
who demands more and more of their workers  
to the point where the demands are impossible to fulfill.

And then you have Herod the puppet king of the Jews,  
the Romans have him in their pockets and he's full of corruption.  
In fact the first half of Mark 6 describes a party thrown by Herod  
and it gives you a picture of the type of leader he is.  
Foolish, easily manipulated. He's caring for himself and not the sheep.

And so Jesus steps into what we can correctly call the *leadership gap*,  
and how does he fill the gap?

Note the end of verse 34: he began teaching them many things.

What is it that makes a good leader?

Perhaps its an ability to organize?

What about the ability to create vision and direction?

Does it involve ability with people?

Those things are useful and important,

but the leadership Jesus provides is one where *teaching* is the focus.

As a flock of sheep, we are led when we hear the voice of our leader,

*Teaching is the primary tool of Christian leadership,*

We need to remember that as we go about the business of organizing our church life.

The temptation will always be to promote leaders who *make stuff happen*,  
and while those executive skills do have a place, they must not be promoted  
at the expense of closing off the pathway that connects us with Christ,  
the pathway of hearing the Bible being taught.

And so at this time in Jesus' ministry we see him opening up that pipeline again,

The Pharisees had closed it,

Herod wasn't interested,

(in fact he killed the last of the great prophets – John the Baptist)

But Jesus saw what was so desperately needed and wanted by all these people,

and so -- with great grace you'll notice –

he allows his retreat to be disrupted he supplies what has been missing.

And so this is the first reason why this story is so significant.

Even before we get to the miracle,

the setting and actions of Jesus posit him as the true leader of God's people.

He's picking up where Moses left off;

here he is in the wilderness feeding the flock with the word of God.

And he does so until quite late in the day

It's at this point that the 12 disciples of Jesus return to the picture,

and they make the suggestion that Jesus dismiss and disperse the crowd  
so the people can find food to eat.

Perhaps this suggestion has more too it,

perhaps they wanted to regain their time of rest.

But Jesus turns the tables on them

V37 You give them something to eat.

Commentators suggest that the disciples' response in the 2nd half of verse 37

has an abrasive edge to it; they're a little bit cranky with Jesus.

Perhaps their tiredness has brought them close to the edge:

*"Come on! That would take almost a year's wages!*

*You want us to spend that much?"*

But Jesus is persistent,

How many loaves do you have? Go and see.

He is absolutely intent on *having the apostles involved in this process*.

Five loaves, and two fish is the reply.

<sup>39</sup>Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass.

That observation is more important than you might think.

I remember hearing a fellow youth leader speak on this miracle a few years back, and he made the observation that Jesus is enacting Psalm 23.

The Lord is my shepherd...

He makes me lie down in green pastures.

You'll notice the very next story in Mark 6 is Jesus calming a storm

What else does Psalm 23 say? He leads me beside still waters.

And of course he prepares a banquet for me, which is what Jesus is doing here.

The miracle is all about Jesus being the true shepherd of Ps 23.

But it's a shepherding that is passed on to the disciples.

After Jesus gives thanks he passes the food to *the disciples* to distribute (v41),

V 42 Everyone eats and is satisfied.

And then v43 twelve baskets are picked up afterwards.

This result of 12 baskets left over echoes yet another part of the Old Testament,

In 2 Kings 4 there's an obscure story of Elisha the prophet

directing a man to feed 100 mouths with 20 loaves.

The man protests how can I set this before 100 men? But Elisha answered "Give it to the people to eat, for this is what the Lord says 'they will eat and have some left over.'" Then he set it before them and they ate and had some left over, according to the word of the Lord."

Did you know that these feedings in the Gospels have an OT precedent?

So this is the significance of the miracle here:

Jesus and his apostles are shepherds *in the tradition of the prophets*.

It's their job to lead God's people *through speaking of God's word*.

The echoes of Moses that we have in this story, the echoes of Elisha,

they locate Jesus and his friends as ones who are *leading by feeding*;

leading men and women back to a place under God's leadership,

and they do this by teaching the word of God.

And so from the Apostles to us.

Even though this is a shorter episode, it's still part of our 10 week series titled *Growing more like Jesus*,

and what we've seen in this miracle is Christ's concern for a leaderless crowd, and how his response is to ensure that they receive the right teaching.

It's a task that is in turn entrusted to the Apostles,

and so it's a task entrusted to us, not only on account of Christ's example but also because we are a church continuing the Apostles' work.

Whatever else we might do, our primary task as a church  
is to open the word of God to as many people as will listen,  
so that they might receive the kind of shepherding they need;  
The leadership and care that comes from Christ himself.

The two questions that remain are these:  
Where are the crowds that need this shepherding,  
and how are we going to teach them?

I'll speak about that in a few minutes time.  
But right now, another song!