

Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Introduction]

As we step through the Gospel according to Mark this church year, I have to admit, that last week, after I read the story about John the Baptist's beheading and then finished it with, "This is the Gospel of the Lord." I thought to myself, "I'm not sure I'd call John's beheading the 'Gospel'." But all the same, Mark included that story as an excursion. Framed beforehand, by Jesus sending out the twelve, and framed afterward, by our Gospel reading today where the apostles return.

Last week's Gospel reading wasn't just filler material, Mark is teaching us to draw comparisons. Comparisons between Herod's Banquet of death for John the Baptist and Jesus' miraculous banquet of bread and fish at the feeding of the five-thousand. Good teachers help us to see and draw comparisons. Listen again to the story of Jesus feeding the five-thousand as I take my own excursions to help you draw comparisons. To help you understand how God is working in your life.

[Biblical Story]

After "the apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught" (Mk 6:30). Jesus can't help but notice how exhausted they all are. They have done a great job on this mission trip and despite their energetic stories about how they preached repentance, drove out demons, and healed the sick, Jesus can tell that now is the time for them to have a moment to recharge.

You would think, that after finishing the mission trip the disciples would finally get a break, but the crowds and the petitioners just keep pressing Jesus and His disciples for more. They can't seem to get enough of God's Word and miracles. Mark even records for us that the disciples, "had no leisure even to eat" (Mk 6:31).

So, Jesus tells His disciples, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while... And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves" (Mk 6:31-32).

[Excursion]

How many times have I wished that I could get away and have a vacation to recharge after a vacation? Granted with four young children Hope and I often have to take a vacation day just to prepare for the vacation. Then after we return it usually takes us another 2-3 weeks before we finally get the suitcases fully unpacked and put away.

Jesus understands the demands of mission work. He understands that we all need time to re-center and refocus on God's Words. You could almost call Jesus' trip, to a desolate place, more of a learning retreat than anything else. Jesus wanted to allow the disciples to rest for a while and take the opportunity to mentor them on their experiences.

[Biblical Story]

However, it seems like even Jesus' plans aren't fully in His control. Because, as Jesus and His disciples were trying to get away, "many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them" (Mk 6:33).

It is at this point that we see the character of Jesus truly groan under His many responsibilities. The point of this trip was for His disciples, but as Jesus sees the crowds, "he had compassion on them" (Mk 6:34).

The Greek implies that his guts were ripped up or he was wrenched in his guts. Jesus was torn between the need to teach His disciples while letting them rest and His need to teach these poor people while giving them direction and leadership.

Coming to a decision, Jesus, in compassion, decides to teach these "sheep without a shepherd" (Mk 6:34).

The disciples, wait patiently during Jesus' first lecture, but as the day draws late and as Jesus' additional sermon goes long, you can see the disciples squirming and fidgeting like little kids sitting in pews after the first five minutes of a sermon.

As the disciples sit on the grass waiting for their chance to rest and relax away from the crowds, it finally dawns on them, that in all likelihood, the crowds probably didn't bring any food with them as they ran along the coastline of the Sea of Galilee. In fact, the disciples realize, that the disciples **themselves** never had an opportunity to eat before they left on this journey. At that realization, the disciples begin to complain and grumble.

They point out to Jesus that, "this is a desolate place, and the hour is now late" (Mk 6:35). They want Jesus to dismiss the crowd so that they can go buy themselves something to eat. Coincidentally, this would also give the disciples a chance to get food themselves and eat it in peace without all the crowds.

The disciples are grumbling and complaining about the “now.”

In response to their grumbling, Jesus says, “You give them something to eat” (Mk 6:37).

Flabbergasted, the disciples respond by complaining that it would cost about 200 days’ worth of wages just to give these five-thousand men a little bit of bread.

Plus, having just returned from a mission journey, where Jesus told his disciples to take no money with them, it is unlikely they would even be able to pull together the 200 denarii to buy the bread with.

The disciples are grumbling and complaining about the “now.”

Plus, looking at their finances, the disciples are worried about the days “not yet” here.

But Jesus, in a tone of an elementary school teacher asking a leading question says, “How many loaves do you have? Go and see.” (Mk 6:38).

Realizing that Jesus is turning this into a hands-on teaching opportunity the disciples head out and find fives loaves and two fish.

[Excursion]

How many times have you found something to grumble about in the midst of blessings?

As you’ve gone through the renovation of the Narthex, Library, and Chapel you’ve been in the midst of the blessings of God’s vision and direction for our church. And yet how many times did you find yourself stressed, impatient, and overly critical with the results and timeline of the project? In the midst of your vision coming to a reality you complained about the now.

How many times have you been looking at your bills and thought to yourself, “The numbers can’t be right!? There is no way we spent this much. There is no way we can pay for all of this. We can’t seem to get our savings account to where we want it.” In the midst of your grumbling and complaining about the now you lose hope and worry about the not yet.

What have you grumbled and complained about lately? What you have failed to trust God to take care of for you in the “Now?” How have you lost hope and worried about the “Not Yet?”

[Biblical Story]

After the disciples tell Jesus about the five loaves and two fish that they found, He commands the people to recline at table. To sit down for the banquet feast that is about to begin. The banquet that will take place in this desolate place on the lush green grass.

Then “taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all” (Mk 6:41).

The miracle almost seems to go unnoticed by the disciples. Here they are grumbling and complaining about the now, the current lack of food, but Jesus in perfect demonstration shows them what they can expect in the “Now” **and** in the “Not Yet.” An endless supply of bread and food simply at the will and touch of Jesus’ hand.

Like an all-you-can buffet at a wedding banquet, the crowd of at least five-thousand ate and ate and ate until they were all fully satisfied.

[Conclusion]

Jesus teaches and blesses us in the “Now” and focuses us on the “Not Yet.” We grumble and complain, but Jesus fully satisfies us with the blessings we need now. He teaches us like he taught the disciples by asking us, “How many loaves do you have? Go and see.” (Mk 6:38). We bring back blessings that we think are insufficient to the task, but at the will and touch of Jesus’ hand, those blessings never seem to run out. God takes care of you and blesses you now. He forgives your grumbling and complaining, he satisfies your need for peace, he restores you to him. He teaches you what to expect in the Not Yet.

In the Now and Not Yet Kingdom of God we are taught in the Now what to expect in the Not Yet. In the Now, Jesus demonstrates that as a host to over five-thousand people, he puts forth an all-you-can-eat banquet of bread and fish, but in the Not Yet we look forward to the eternal banquet in the new heavens and the new earth with Jesus, the Son of God, as our host.

Rejoice, because Jesus takes your grumbling and complaining. He takes your weaknesses and your sins. He takes your stress and impatience about the Now. He takes them and out of love and compassion, he demonstrates His power to forgive, His power to bless, and His power to show you what to expect in the Now and Not Yet Kingdom of God. Amen.

“Now may the God of peace... equip you with everything good that you may do His will, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.” (Heb 13:20-21)
