

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

[A Desolate Place]

It's 2000 years ago.

The Twelve have just returned from long journeys in *desolate places*.

Earlier in this chapter, Jesus had sent them out, two-by-two across the country,
as if they were travelling salesmen on company business.

(Mark 6:7-13)

(Makes you wonder who got stuck with Judas?

Thomas couldn't believe it.

Peter and Andrew thought something was 'fishy' the whole time.

If James and John heard these jokes, they'd be 'thundering' with laughter.)

Sent out in pairs, they were to preach, heal the sick, drive out demons—
can you imagine the things they would've seen?

Surely, they were excited to tell Jesus about it

back at company headquarters at Capernaum—

but also mentally, emotionally, physically exhausted!

On the way, these crowds have them working so hard,

Mark says, “*they had no leisure even to eat.*”

(Mark 6:31)

Jesus knows how they're feeling.

Jesus knows all things.

Jesus knows how exhausted *He* will feel three short years from now,
when He will take all griefs and sufferings and sins to Himself
and exchange them for new life for us.

Yes, Jesus sees their exhaustion and He has compassion.

So He invites them to come away with Him to “a desolate place.”

Now “desolate” in this context doesn't mean a desert, or a wasteland.

In fact, the area around the Sea of Galilee is pretty green!

“Desolate” here just means a place away from... people.

Distant from the world.

Jesus is basically inviting them on a “company retreat.”

(Minus the nametags and teambuilding activities.)

They gladly hop in the boat.

It's the company boat, so one disciple logs the milage— you know, for tax purposes...

Perhaps Matthew, the former tax collector.

Judas starts 'networking,' asks how many dependents one could claim
before Rome caught on... “Oh, no reason!”

Another disciple forgot to contact the caterer;

they only have five loaves of bread at the continental breakfast.

And you'd've thought someone microwaved tuna in the breakroom again,
but it's just the two fish that somebody brought along for a snack.

Five loaves. Two fish.

No one thought to bring a Snickers bar or something?

Well, glorious Company of the Apostles makes its way across the Sea of Galilee.
But the business retreat will have to wait.

There are customers at the door— er, shore, as it were. Mark says:

*“Many saw [the disciples] going
and ran there on foot from all the towns
and got there ahead of them.”*

(Mark 6:33)

So much for one day without... people.

But the Company Founder is, once again, a compassionate man.

These crowds “chasing after” Him “*were like sheep were without a shepherd.*” (Mark 6:34)

Especially those from the south, where John the Baptist’s work had been, uh... (Mark 6:14-29)
downsized in a hostile takeover after heavy governmental regulation.

So Jesus takes time to teach them many things.

(Mark 6:34)

It's getting late.

The disciples don't want to close up shop with thousands of customers still in line.

So the well-intentioned managers write up a memo, send it straight to the boss:

*“This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late.
Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages
and buy themselves something to eat.”*

(Mark 6:35-36)

Like a Snickers bar.

Jesus responds: “*You give them something to eat.*”

Well, if that isn't just typical corporate!

Lead your workers out to a desolate place and expect *them* to do the impossible.

Do the disciples look like they're made of Snickers bars?

How are they going to satisfy the crowd?

Well, the managers get together to confer about the budget.

If they pool 200 denarii (about 200 days' wages), they *could* buy enough bread...

Maybe? What are they gonna do?

[How's the story end?]

Maybe you've been in such a situation before.

And maybe it's come even when you were *chasing after Jesus* like you're supposed to!

You do everything right, and you still find yourself... in a *desolate place*.

Those places that might not be literal wastelands or deserts,

But a “desolate place” away from... people.

Distant from the world.

We've all been to that *desolate place* before; because this world *is* a *desolate place*.

As St. Paul explained it in today's Epistle:

*"You were... separated from Christ,
alienated from [His People] and strangers to the covenant of promise,
having no hope and without God in the world."*

(Ephesians 2:12)

But God is in the world!

Jesus' victory did not only destroy death for eternity, it *created* something new now! Paul says:

*"Now, in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off
have been brought near by the blood of Christ...
you are no longer strangers and aliens,
but you are fellow citizens with the saints
and members of the household of God,
built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets,
[with] Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone."*

(Ephesians 2:13, 19-21)

You have been built into something far greater than yourself.

You are living stones in a "holy temple [of] the Lord!"

St. Paul concludes:

*"In Him, you also are being built together
into a **dwelling place** for God by the Spirit."*

(Ephesians 2:22)

You are not in a *desolate* place without people;

You are being built together with those very people into a **dwelling place** for God.

[Compassion]

What does that mean?

Let's go back to that corporate retreat 2,000 years ago.

If you've forgotten the big miracle of the story,

5,000 men (plus women and children!)

were *satisfied* that day,

by just five loaves and two fish—and there were even twelve baskets full of leftovers.

(I hope they put their names on the baskets. Unnamed leftovers are up for grabs.)

Jesus provides because He has *compassion*.

In the Greek, compassion is *σπλαγγνίζομαι* (splangxnidzomai).

It means a deep *physical* feeling in the *gut*—

a stomach-churning kindness that only a real Body and Blood can have.

A visceral queasiness, a *hunger*.

He felt all the things we feel.

Mark says:

"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.**"*

(Mark 6:41)

Taking bread, breaking it... That sounds kinda familiar, doesn't it?

In a few chapters, Mark will use almost the same words:

“[Jesus] took bread, and after blessing it, broke it.

And gave it to [His disciples] and said ‘take and eat.’”

And then the wine.

In that bread and wine, He doesn't satisfy our physical hunger.

(He's not some measly Snickers bar.)

Instead, He satisfies the hunger of our souls.

Because in that Bread and Wine, we truly receive His Body and Blood.

His new life, His salvation and His forgiveness.

Forget the Snickers; Jesus satisfies!

Each and every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper,

you join with thousands upon thousands—billions—of other Christians

from all sorts of *desolate places*.

(Even when we do not have the Lord's Supper, we can feast on His Word all the same!)

What we might miss in Mark's account is *how* Jesus did this:

There's another line in Mark's Gospel that deserves our attention:

“*[He]... gave them **to the disciples** to set before the people.*”

You see, Jesus uses His *people* to satisfy His *people's* needs.

He has made you His dwelling place.

God lives in you!

In Jesus, you are never in a truly *desolate place*.

In Jesus, you are never alone.

In Jesus, God lives in you.

And in Jesus, *you* bring God to His people.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.

**Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous deeds among the people. Amen! (Psalm 96:3)**
