



Sermon Transcript February 4, 2018

Gospel of Mark: The Good News of Jesus

No Need to Fear

Mark 6:30-52

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on February 4, 2018 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio version of this sermon can be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com.

Sermon Text
Mark 6:30-52

³⁰ The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹ And he said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. ³² And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. ³³ Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.

³⁴ When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things. ³⁵ And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, “This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. ³⁶ Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.” ³⁷ But he answered them, “You give them something to eat.” And they said to him “Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?” ³⁸ And he said to them, “How many loaves do you have? Go and see.” And when they had found out, they said, “Five, and two fish.” ³⁹ Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰ So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. ⁴¹ And 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. ⁴² And they all ate and were satisfied. ⁴³ And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. ⁴⁴ And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men.

⁴⁵ Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. ⁴⁶ And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray. ⁴⁷ And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. ⁴⁸ And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them, ⁴⁹ but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, ⁵⁰ for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.” ⁵¹ And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, ⁵² for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

Introduction

This morning we come to the miracle known as the feeding of the five thousand. It is probably one of the most familiar miracles Jesus performed. Did you know that it is the only miracle of Jesus that is recorded in all four Gospels? That fact alone tells me that there is something about this miracle that is important for us to understand.

Matthew, Mark and Luke each record for us around twenty of the miracles of Jesus. John only tells us about seven of the miracles of Jesus. Three of those miracles are unique to John. Matthew, Mark and Luke don't mention anything about the miracle of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. John is the only one who tells us about that miracle. I like the way John ends his Gospel. He says, "*Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were everyone of them to be written, I suppose the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.*" This tells us that each Gospel writer was highly selective in the miracles he chose to record for us. We have already seen in Mark that many came to Jesus and many were healed. It says in Mark 1:34, "*And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons.*" But just a small sampling of these miracle stories were told. And yet, this one miracle out of them all is the one miracle that is recorded by all four Gospel writers. That tells me that this is an important miracle and it tells us something about Jesus we need to see and understand.

That is the irony I find in Mark's account of the feeding of the five thousand. Whatever it is that Jesus is telling us about himself through this miracle seems to be lost on the disciples. After this miracle, the disciples get in a boat to cross the lake while Jesus goes off to pray. Again, like we saw last week, a windstorm had come up against them and they were having trouble getting anywhere. And it is here where Jesus walks out onto the water to meet them. They thought it was a ghost and they were afraid. But after Jesus identified himself, he got in the boat and wind died down. And then it says this in verse 52, "*they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.*" In other words, they didn't yet comprehend what Jesus was communicating about himself through the feeding of the five thousand.

Their lack of comprehension comes up again in Mark 8. Here the disciples misread what Jesus said and they think Jesus was disappointed with them because they didn't bring enough bread for their trip. It says in Mark 8:14, "*Now they had forgotten to bring bread, and they had only one loaf with them in the boat.*" Somewhat frustrated, they seem to be kicking themselves for not bringing enough food. How in the world are they ever going to have enough to eat? What makes this such a puzzling response on the part

of the disciples was that not only had Jesus fed the five thousand, but he duplicated that miracle by feeding the four thousand. So here Jesus is with the disciples and the disciples are wondering how they are going to ration a loaf of bread for each one of them to get a bite. Jesus looks at them as if to ask, “where have you been?” He looks at them and basically says, “Didn’t you see me feed five thousand?” “Didn’t you see me feed four thousand?” In each case he reminds them that each time there were “left-overs.” Why doesn’t it dawn on anyone in the boat to take that one loaf with faith and hand it to Jesus? And so Jesus wonders out loud, “*Do you not yet understand?*”

It makes me wonder, “what did the disciples see when Jesus fed the five thousand?” And it also makes me wonder, “what should they have seen when Jesus fed the five thousand?” Obviously, they missed the point of this important miracle. Which makes me wonder, “what are we supposed to see when we come to this miracle?” Perhaps, like the disciples, we may come to this miracle and see something, but do we see the “something” that Jesus wants us to see through this miracle? What is that “something” Jesus wants us to see here?

Often when we tell this story, the person we see is a little boy with five loaves and two fish. Often, we make this little boy the focal point of the story. As the disciples are searching high and low, scrounging around to find food to feed this vast crowd, all they can find is one boy with five loaves and two fish. From the five loaves and two fish, Jesus feeds the multitude. So often what we do when we come to this miracle is we make the boy the focal point and we praise him for being willing to share what he had and we say things like this, “God can take little things and turn them into something that is great.” While that is true, that is not the point of the miracle. In fact, John is the only one of the Gospel writers who even mentions the boy. Mark doesn’t mention him. So clearly, the boy can’t be the focal point of this miracle. And furthermore, when John follows this miracle with the teaching of Jesus we hear Jesus say, “*I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.*” So at the very least, when we seek to understand the point of this miracle, we need to make sure that Jesus is the focal point. What is Mark telling us about Jesus through this miracle?

And furthermore, you get the sense that whatever he is telling us about Jesus through this miracle, should have a calming affect on us. When Jesus gets in the boat he says to them, “*Do not be afraid.*” It is in this context we get the commentary that says, “*for they did not understand about the loaves.*” The implication is that if they had “understood about the loaves” they would not be afraid. What is it about this miracle that brings peace to the heart? How does this miracle speak peace to our fears?

The Disciples Saw a “Marvel”

Lets begin by asking the question, “what did the disciples see when they witnessed this amazing miracle of the feeding of the five thousand?” Our passage begins in verse 30 and it tells us that the disciples had just returned from a “successful missions trip.” Earlier in Mark 6:7-13, we discover that Jesus had sent them out in pairs to proclaim the message of repentance and they were granted authority to cast out demons and to heal. And we discover in verse 13 that indeed “*they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them.*” Consequently, they saw God do some amazing things through them. And so in verse 30 they are coming off of this amazing experience and they are sitting down debriefing with Jesus what they experienced. It says in verse 30, “*they told him all that they had done and taught.*”

But now they are getting a little taste for what it was like for Jesus. Because of what they were able to do, the crowd was following them wherever they went. You get the sense that the crowd around them was so present and continually bringing people to the disciples and to Jesus that it says in verse 31, “*they had no leisure even to eat.*” That can be exhausting. Jesus knows how exhausting this can be, and so he invites the disciples to take a “retreat” and to get some rest. He says to them, “*Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.*” And so they get in a boat and head to a desolate place to get some much needed rest.

But we discover in verse 33 that someone . . . somewhere . . . somehow discovered where they were going and they spread the word. I love how it says, “*they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.*” This “desolate” place, all of a sudden, no longer seemed very “desolate.” I am an introvert. Do you know what that means? When I need to “re-charge” my battery, I need alone time. An extrovert, on the other hand, gains energy by being with people. So I can’t read this story apart from the perspective of an introvert. In fact, I often wonder how many of the disciples had “introvert” tendencies. I can just imagine the relief they may have felt when Jesus suggested they get in a boat and head for a desolate place. I can also imagine the feelings that emerged when they got to this supposedly “desolate” place and saw this massive crowd gathered on the shore. I would have given Jesus that look that conveyed, “can’t we just stay out in the water?” But as soon as you look into the face of Jesus you see someone who “*had compassion on them, because they were sheep without a shepherd.*”

So Jesus goes to the crowd and he spends time teaching them many things. But it is now getting late and since this is a “desolate” place the disciples suggest to Jesus that he send

the crowd off into the villages and towns to go and buy something to eat. That seems like a very practical thing to suggest. But Jesus turns to them and says, “*You give them something to eat.*” The disciples are rather incredulous that Jesus would make such a request of them. First of all, they are coming off of a mission trip where they were instructed not to take any money or food with them—in verse 8 the instructions were, “*no bread, no bag, no money.*” And furthermore, if they had money, it would take nearly a whole year’s worth of wages just to serve everyone some bread. Who even carries that kind of money with them? It is somewhat reminiscent of Moses who had to feed 600,000, who were also out in a “desolate place.” He cries out to God in Numbers 11:22, “*Shall flocks and herds be slaughtered for them, and be enough for them? Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, and be enough for them?*” And so God responds and says, “*Is the Lord’s hand too short? Now you will see whether my word will come true for you or not.*”

That seems to be the place where the disciples are as well. They are put in a place that is impossible for them, but not for Jesus. And why didn’t it dawn on them that the one who calmed the storm, cast out the demon, healed a woman who just reached out and touched the hem of his garment and who brought a little girl back from the dead—just might have the ability to feed this crowd? But it doesn’t even appear to be an idea that crosses their mind. So Jesus says, “well what do you have?” They came back with five loaves of bread and two fish.

When they got everyone organized and seated, it says in verse 41, “*And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing.*” He probably prayed the common Jewish prayer during a meal. It went like this, “Praise be Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who causes bread to come forth from the earth.”¹ Somehow, he broke the bread and divided the fish and not only did he feed the multitude, but there were twelve baskets left over at the end. We don’t know how the bread appeared or where it appeared, only that it did appear. The result of Jesus feeding the people was that “*they ate and were satisfied.*”

So what did the disciples see with this miracle? They were participants in this miracle. They had a front row seat to this miracle. They knew how much food they had at the start and they knew what they collected at the end. So what did they see? They saw a “marvel.” I am sure they were impressed. I am sure they were talking among each other with amazement as they went about and collected the leftovers. It was indeed a “marvel” to behold. But that is all they saw. In John’s account of this miracle, the result was not the thinning of the crowd. Once Jesus fed them, the crowds stuck to him even closer

than before. And in John 6:26, Jesus turns to them and says, *“You are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.”* John called the miracles of Jesus, “signs.” These “signs” he says in John 20:31 were written *“that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.”* In other words, the miracles were not just “marvels” performed by Jesus. They were “signs” that pointed to Jesus. In some sense, the disciples were no different from the crowd. They saw the “marvel” but they still do not fully see the “man.” They saw the miracle. But they missed Jesus.

They Should Have Seen the “Man”

What is it that the disciples failed to see from this very important miracle? First of all, we need to acknowledge that hindsight is 20/20. There are numerous things that Jesus said and did that didn’t come into full focus for the disciples until after his death and resurrection. So as Mark is recording this miracle for us, through the eyes of Peter, he is filling in some of the details we need to see in order to understand what this miracle tells us about Jesus. We don’t want to just see the “marvel” of Jesus feeding the multitude with just five loaves and two fish. We want to see what this miracle tells us about Jesus. And the key to understanding the point of the miracle is found in verse 34. As they came ashore and saw the crowd it says of Jesus, *“he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.”* This is a loaded statement that takes us deep into the Old Testament.

The first place we need to go is Numbers 27:17. In this passage, Moses is taken up to the top of a mountain where he is allowed to take a look at the land that God is going to give as an inheritance to Israel. But because of a past failing, Moses was forbidden to be the one to lead the people of Israel into the Promised Land. After coming down from the mountain, Moses expresses his concern that if he can’t lead the people then God must appoint someone to be his successor, *“who shall lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the LORD may not be as sheep that have no shepherd.”*

Sheep need shepherds. Lena Woltering describes the job description of a shepherd. “He is someone who stays with his sheep at all costs, guiding, protecting, and walking with them through the fields. He is not just a person who raises sheep. He leads sheep.”² So this became a common picture for God in his care for his people and for God’s leaders who represent the means of God’s care for his people. So Joshua, which is the Hebrew name for Jesus, was appointed to lead the people of Israel into the Promised Land.

Psalm 78 is a long psalm. It has seventy-two verses in it. It recounts the story of Israel

and how God brought them out of slavery in Egypt and led them to the Promised Land. It is here, where God is likened to a shepherd caring for his sheep. In Psalm 78:52-55 it says, *“Then he led out his people like sheep and guided them in the wilderness like a flock. He led them in safety, so that they were not afraid . . . And he brought them to his holy land . . . and settled the tribes of Israel in their tents.”*

The leaders of Israel were also called “shepherds.” The problem, however, was that they didn’t always do a good job tending to the “sheep,” that is God’s people. In Ezekiel 34, God scolds the religious leaders of Israel for their neglect and their failure to care for the sheep. So when Jesus sees these people as *“sheep without a shepherd”* he is making the same judgment of the religious leaders of his day as well. In fact, right before the feeding of the five thousand, there is another feast that is described for us. It is the feast hosted by Herod in the palace. And yet it ends with treachery and political abuse of power. It ends with the unjust execution of John the Baptist. And so the people of Israel on the religious side and the political side are like *“sheep without a shepherd.”*

And so the prophets, Ezekiel and Isaiah, began to talk about a new “exodus” where God would deliver and tend to his people. He says in Ezekiel 34:15, *“I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down.”* In Ezekiel 34:23 God says, *“I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them and be their shepherd.”* It interesting that in Ezekiel 34:25 it then says that when this shepherd comes *“they shall dwell securely in the wilderness.”* It is not accidental that the feeding of the five thousand happened at “a desolate place.”

Isaiah 40 is the final passage that will speak into this miracle this morning. This is the passage that is quoted at the beginning of the Gospel of Mark to introduce John the Baptist who points us to Jesus. In this chapter, Isaiah made it clear that God himself would *“come with might . . . who will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.”* And so we get these hints that God is going to come and shepherd his people and this shepherd will also be a descendant of David. When Jesus provides bread for the multitude out in that desolate place, he is doing more than just performing a “marvel.” He is identifying himself as that divine Shepherd who comes to deliver and provide for the needs of the sheep.

When it says in verse 52 that *“they did not understand about the loaves,”* that is what they didn’t understand. They still did not comprehend that God himself has come to shepherd and care for his people. This point gets all the more solidified when Jesus came

to them walking on the water. When it says in verse 48, “*He meant to pass by them*” there are all kinds of ideas as to what that means. I don’t think it means that he was just going to walk past them, like he is taking a stroll on the water. Interestingly, it is the same word used two times in the Old Testament when the glory of God passes by Moses and later Elijah. In both those events, God was revealing himself and his glory to Moses and to Elijah. David Garland writes, “Only God can walk on the sea, and Jesus’ greeting is not simply a cheery hello to assuage the disciple’s fears. He greets them with the divine formula of self-revelation, ‘I am.’”³ When you read the greeting, “*Take heart, It is I. Do not be afraid*” it is meant to be read with Isaiah 43 in the back of our thinking. Here it is said of the coming promised servant of God, “*It is I, even I am the LORD and apart from me there is no Savior.*”

That is what the disciples did not see in the loaves of bread. They saw the “marvel” of the miracle. But they did not see that in the man, Jesus, was the actual presence of God. The Great Shepherd, God himself, *Yahweh*, was present among them in Jesus. They failed to recognize through the miracle of the loaves that God was among them and as their shepherd he has come with great compassion to deliver us and care for our needs. Clearly his compassion is seen in feeding the multitude and meeting the disciples in their distress out in the middle of the sea. This is what they should have seen and had they seen it, they would not have been afraid—even in the storm.

What do YOU see?

So what do you see? No doubt, you see something, but do you see the “something” that Jesus wants you to see with this miracle? Do you just see the “marvel” of taking five loaves of bread and two fish and satisfying the hunger of the five thousand? Or do you see the “man” - the God man—Jesus? One of the characteristics of the power of God in the Old Testament is his power over the sea. Even in Psalm 78, God the shepherd is portrayed as one who led Israel through the sea “*but the sea overwhelmed their enemies.*” By walking on the water, Jesus presents himself as God.

This is the point Mark is trying to show us through his Gospel. He comes right out and states his conviction about Jesus in Mark 1:1, “*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*” So the “something” you must see when you come to this miracle is simply that Jesus is God. Now to the seasoned Christian, of which there are many here this morning, perhaps you are looking at me and saying, “is that it?” That is the big “reveal” of this miracle. That is Christianity 101. It took you a whole sermon to get to this point? It is just the starting point, but before you are quick to move from here,

sometimes we are like the disciples where our understanding of Jesus is intellectual but we don't always put our faith in Jesus like we should. If you believe that Jesus is God, do you believe that he meets your needs and do you have peace? It was their fear in the storm that demonstrated that they didn't yet understand the meaning of the loaves. So yes, perhaps in your mind you say, "I believe that Jesus is God." But do you exercise faith by resting in his care and trusting in his presence with you?

The "something" you must also see in this miracle is that as your shepherd, Jesus meets your needs. Like the bread that was served in that desolate place, he satisfies your soul. That meal Jesus served in that desolate place was a foretaste of the meal we just shared with one another. Through the bread and the cup, we were reminded of how Jesus has delivered us and meets our every need. He is the answer to the Jewish prayer of thanks, "Praise be Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who causes bread to come forth from the earth." John says in John 6:33, "*For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.*" The care of Jesus for you can't be said any better than what we read in Psalm 23.

"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters
He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil,
for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever."

The "something" you must see in this miracle is that if Jesus is God and if he is the Good Shepherd who cares for his sheep, you do not need to be afraid. You don't need to fear the trend of culture as if the world is spinning out of control. Jesus, our shepherd, is the exalted Lord who sits over all things. You don't need to fear whether your needs will be met. In telling us not to worry about tomorrow, Jesus assures us that if we seek first the kingdom of God, all these things will be added unto you. You do not need to be fearful of your trial and your suffering, because it is being used by God for your good, producing within us endurance, character and hope. You do not even need to fear death. Jesus, the Son of God, our good shepherd, has already defeated the grave. He died on the cross and rose again victorious over the grave. And so the "something" you must see in the provision of bread and the mastery over the sea is that God will "*keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.*"

Benediction

“May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that Great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good to do his will and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever. Amen.”

¹William Lane *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 230

²Cited in David E Garland *Mark: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 258

³*Ibid.*, 263

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COMMUNITY GROUPS

Getting To Know Me Questions

1. Are you an introvert or an extrovert? Do you “recharge your battery” by being alone or by being with people? Describe your ideal Friday night.
2. Share one thing about the past week that you would like others in the group to know.
3. Share one thought you took from the sermon this past week?

Diving Into The Word

4. Read Mark 6:30-44 and discuss the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand. What stands out to you about this miracle? Why do you think out of all the miracles Jesus performed, this is the one miracle recorded in all four Gospels?
5. Read Mark 6:34 and discuss what this verse tells you about Jesus. How does Psalm 78:52-55, 70-72 and Ezekiel 34:11-16, 23-24 help us understand what Jesus is revealing about himself through the feeding of the five thousand?
6. Read Mark 6:45-52. Compare this story to the time when God “passed by” Moses in Exodus 34:5-7. What do you think Jesus was trying to reveal to the disciples by walking on the water? How does Jesus calm our fears?
7. Read Psalm 23 and remind yourself how Jesus, our Good Shepherd cares for us. What line in Psalm 23 most stands out to you and why?

Taking It Home

8. What is one thing you observed about Jesus through this study that you can praise him for?
9. What fear has a grip on your heart that you need to entrust to the Good Shepherd?