

“I Need A Miracle”

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Mark 6:30-46

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On the surface of things this would appear a rather straightforward account which reflects the compassion of Jesus for people who are burdened with physical needs. Here is mob of hungry people and Jesus feeds them. **All the miracle stories of the New Testament can be read from this perspective.** If you are sick, come to Jesus for he is the healer. If you are driven by demons, no matter how you wish to interpret demon possession, come to Jesus. He drives out your demons. It even extends to the great demon called death. If your daughter dies, then follow the lead of Jairus and get Jesus on the scene. Your friend can die and be tucked away in the tomb, like Lazarus, but if Jesus comes, all will be well. And as today's text reminds us, if you have failed to prepare for the future and find yourself wasting away in some wilderness, Jesus will feed you; Jesus will take care of you. Isn't it strange that out of all these thousands of people only one was far-sighted enough to pack a meal of loaves and fish? Truth be known, it was probably the boy's mother who anticipated this crisis. Where would we be without our mothers? But the message comes through again, **"If you are hungry, hang around with Jesus. Whatever you need, Jesus is your man."** You have a question? You have a problem? Jesus is the answer.

Now, of course, there is **quite a bundle of truth** in this way of reading the New Testament. **We ought to be quite impressed with the remarkable compassion of Jesus.** In our text Jesus and the disciples are exhausted from their teaching and ministering. He invites the disciples to come away to a lonely place, to go on a retreat to restore their energies. They get on a boat to get away from it all for a while, but the crowds clamor after them, getting to the destination before they can land. And he looks upon them with aggravation and impatience? No! That would be understandable, but no, he looks upon them with compassion, like sheep without a shepherd. What a descriptive phrase for the confusion, exasperation, and turmoil of our moment in history, our country, all the stuff going on in our country...our world, all the stuff going on in our world. Our own lives, all the stuff going on in our lives. Sheep without a shepherd. Bumbling, stumbling, confused, & anxious. Looking to human leaders to deliver us from our wilderness, while knowing full well that they are all in way over their heads, floundering, all while trying to convince us that they have the answers. How comforting it is to know that above us, beneath us, and around all our human strivings and failings, in every wilderness where we find ourselves trapped and without resources, there is One who looks upon us with compassion and never tires of reaching out to feed us and lead us. Our good Shepherd.

But, on the other hand, there is a problem with reading the New Testament from this perspective. If you read the account of the feeding of the thousands in the Gospel of John, as an aside, it's interesting to note that this is the only miracle that is recorded in all four of the Gospels. It's like saying, "pay attention to this!" after the feeding of the thousands, Jesus perceives that these masses of people were about to come, take him by force, and make him a king... a bread-King. Again, he tries to make an escape by boat, and again the people scamper

around the shoreline and arrive ahead of him. This time Jesus tells them, "You seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves! Do not labor for food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life."

Are you listening? Are you hungry? Hungry for what? What do you want from Jesus? A cure for your diseases? A stable economy? More income with less taxes? Healing for the environment? A place of refuge from terrorists? Racial harmony? A good job with a guaranteed pension? Politicians who are selfless and compassionate rather than self serving and power hungry?

Are you hungry? What do you want from Jesus? If you listen to the New Testament talk about the New Testament, if you listen to the telling of the parables, if you pay attention to the miracles of Jesus, if you read St. Paul's letters you soon realize that **it is all about the coming of the Kingdom!** The whole story of the ministry of Jesus is about **the ushering in of the kingdom of God!** Again and again, Jesus tells the disciples, "Go and proclaim the kingdom of God," "The kingdom of God is not here or there but in the midst of you," "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to..." "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God," "But the Kingdom of God does not mean food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Spirit."

I could go on and on like this... passage after passage after passage. **What are you hungry for? What do you want from Jesus?** Are you perhaps letting down your net on the wrong side of the boat?

Are the TV preachers who tirelessly bait people into church promising prosperity if you just follow Jesus really proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom? One writer says it so well... "Every miracle of Jesus is a signpost of the Kingdom of God fulfilled... If someone is healed, it is a sign of that time when there is no illness, no suffering or pain or sorrow...If demons are driven out, it is the sign of the defeat of the Evil One, the prince of demons...If someone is raised from the dead, it is a sign that death is defeated and there comes a time when death is no more....If someone is fed, it is a sign of the time when there is no more hunger and no more thirst."

In the John 6 passage, Jesus drills home this lesson when the mobs who chased him around the lake said, "What sign you do, that we may see and believe, what work do you perform? Our fathers ate manna in the wilderness." As if to say, you going to feed us dinner again today? You going to fill our pantries and pay our mortgage this month?

And Jesus replied, "It wasn't Moses who gave them bread, but my Father, who gives the true bread from heaven and they said, "Lord, give us this bread. And he said, (You know what he said, say it with me...) **"I am the bread of life...He who comes to me shall never hunger and he who believes in me shall never thirst."** And you can't make enough baskets to gather the leftovers of that banquet! **Are you hungry for this bread?**

Now you may be thinking to yourself, if this is really all about the ultimate Kingdom of God, and the ultimate bread, the Bread of Life, should we really be praying for the healing of our diseases? And deliverance from terrorists? Shelter for the homeless? And politicians with a hint of integrity? And provide soup kitchens for the hungry? Well, of course we should. We have a compassionate Savior who fed really hungry people with real bread and fish, and gave real physical healing to scores of sick and suffering people who as yet had not a clue about the ultimate coming of the Kingdom through the death and resurrection of Jesus. But He would have us always remember that this creaturely stuff is not the essence of the Kingdom, and not the ultimate purpose of his ministry, but the benefit of his compassion for poor wandering, helpless, sick hungry sheep such as we are. **We are sheep with a Shepherd, who leads us to green pasture and clear water, thanks be to God. But his ultimate purpose was fulfilled when He became the Lamb of God, taking away the sin of the world.**

I never read this text without reminding myself that the **disciples of Jesus had only one task** as these thousands of hungry people anxiously sat themselves on the hillside. They were **dispensers of bread**. All they do is take what Jesus gave them, and hand it out. When you think about it, that's pretty much our job description also; dispensers of bread. We have nothing to offer people but what Jesus has given us to give to them.

We should be thinking about that when we hand out brown-bag lunches, and build Habitat House and supply soup kitchens, and food banks. But we should **really** be thinking about that when we come and **kneel at this table and receive the bread of life**. We really have not done much at all, we really haven't fulfilled our purpose until we have distributed the bread that leads to eternal life, doing our part in ushering in the Kingdom of God.

We had 465 kids here in VBS last week. If that was just fun and games to entertain kids in the summer time it would be nothing; not worth all the effort. But this was done to distribute Bread! To point little ones to Jesus, to feed them the Bread of Life. This is our mission.

Are you hungry this morning? Hungry for what? Isaiah the prophet has invitation for you..."Come, all who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost."

This is bread that leads to eternal life! Give us that bread! Amen.