

Sunday September 17, 2023
Lesson 3: Twelve Baskets Left Over
Scripture: Mark 6: 30-44

Context:

Today we continue our fall curriculum, “God Provides.” This first unit is titled “Food,” with several lessons of how God’s providence is in the physical refreshments we receive. Today’s lesson comes from the book of Mark, one of the gospels to tell of the good news of Jesus and his ministry to feed people. The focus of today’s lesson will be to discern how we participate in God’s work of providing abundantly for others.

Today’s lesson focuses on one of the miracles of Jesus, the feeding of the five thousand. We know the significances of this narrative because it is the only miracle of Jesus reported in all four gospels.¹ The narrative follows the pattern of the elemental characteristics of a miracle story: problem, solution, and evidence the miracle has occurred.² For Mark, the story attests to the authority of Jesus and points to his relationship to his disciples and the crowd.³ We see Jesus moving on several levels to feed his disciples and the people gathered together.

The narrative begins with the apostles gathering around Jesus and telling him all they have done and taught. Yet they haven’t had a chance to eat, so Jesus invites them to go and take a rest as they recover from their hard work. Pulling off on a boat, they believe they can go to a solitary place and rest.

However, eyes are watching them from all around the lake so when they arrive at a place to rest, the crowds have followed him there. They too want to learn and grow. Pairing together his compassion and the gift of teaching, Jesus seeks to not only shepherd his apostles, but the crowd as well. He is so intent though his disciples remind him the crowds possess a physical hunger as the hours have gone by quickly.

Yet when Jesus seeks to empower them to feed the crowds, they admonish him as they do not have the wages or resources to do so. Jesus asks them to bring what they do possess: the total being five loaves of bread and two fish. Thus, Jesus feeds them physically as well as spiritually. His demand of his disciples reveals his confidence in them as undershepherds; and that confidence is undergirded by his power to provide all they need for the task with plenty left over for themselves.⁴ Before he has them distribute though, Jesus blesses it.

As the disciples go out among the crowds, there appears to be enough for all. The story becomes a suggested sacrament, its words become living bread that satisfies our deepest hunger

¹ Lamar Williamson Jr., “Mark,” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2009), 124.

² Ibid., 125.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., 126.

and gives us strength to make it home.⁵ Jesus feeds the crowds both literally and spiritually.

Application

When I was in the Holy Land on my ordination trip, we went to several beautiful sites in Galilee. Set amidst the serene Sea of Galilee on the western shore is the Church of the Multiplication near modern day Tabgha. This ancient structure dating from the fourth century is by church tradition the place where Jesus multiplied the loaves and the fishes. At the center of the church is an ancient mosaic with two fish and a basket of bread. Such a simple yet beautiful portrayal of this story.

I include this memory because reading the story reminds me of how when we are fed, we can be fueled to serve or feed others. When I read this story again for today's commentary, I was struck by several things including how Jesus was intentional in feeding various groups of people in different ways. As God feeds people and they realize what is taking place, they too can go forward and feed others.

This narrative starts out with Jesus celebrating with his disciples after they have been on the go, doing things and teaching in his name. Yet with good work comes the need for rest and renewal. If one can do great things in the name of Jesus, then one also needs the rest and relaxation after doing things, even if it is all good things.

There's an important lesson here for all who serve in positions of management and leadership. Do we model rest for people so their souls might be refueled? Part of feeding others begins first with feeding our own souls. In our case, God often gives us a little nudge about what we need and hopefully we be fueled up. It might be a stretch break in the day. Or other times, after a long week we can find the places and the people where we feel a sense of renewal and purpose. God gives us different practices and opportunities to be rested and renewed.

Yet as we discover, even those who work, and labor hard do not always get rest. Just around the corner, there are still things to be done and souls still need in shepherding in the case of Jesus and his apostles. Never one to give up on the crowds gathering at the shore, Jesus is filled with compassion when he sees people are still hungry to learn and grow. So he begins to teach.

Unaware of the time, Jesus' apostles remind him of how the people not only need teaching, but they also need physical food as well. In this miracle, Jesus shows his power, both in the blessing and then in the distribution of the food. God is not one to step back from the challenge and God will always feeds those who seek the Lord.

As I read this part of the passage, I was struck by how Jesus was moved by compassion and then continued to push his disciples even when they could not see the abundance in front of them. The miracle shows the power of God and also how humanity can be blinded to what God gives in front of us to share and to give unto others.

The most mature Christians I know always see the abundance of God in front of them. I am not talking about Pollyanna's or people who see through rose-colored lenses. I am talking about people who try to see what they have in front of them and how they can make it spread. They can see how sharing the abundance of God is noticing what we have been given and how

⁵ Ibid., 128.

God calls us to share it in the world. No one is without as God has given something to all to share in the world.

Whenever I get to a place where I think I do not have “this” or “that,” I try to sit still and think of what God has given me. Usually as I begin to write down a list, go for a jog, or brainstorm with other Christians, I see God has given all of us an abundance to share with the world. Sometimes we just the nudge to see the table has been set and the Lord has indeed provided for us abundantly.

What are experiences where you have been fed abundantly? How do we rest so we might be refueled? When are times you have been pushed to see you have more resources than you think? Why do you think Jesus has compassion for all those who come to him both in the text and today in the world? What are practices to help you see God feeds you and those around you? ***Below is a picture of the mosaic at the Church of the Multiplication in Tabgha, Israel. Google to read the story to help you see the rich history of this beautiful place.



Rev. Dr. E. Hunter Pugh
Pastor of Brantley – Brunson Chapel Charge
PO Box 71
Brantley, AL 36009

