

A Second Miraculous Meal -- Mark 8:1-10

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Please bow your heads with me for prayer:

Father, today as we open Your Word we will be treading upon holy ground. Your Word has been filled with the very breath of God. And so, we come with reverence, confessing our unworthiness to open its pages. But we also come with confidence knowing that the message it contains is meant for us. May the same Spirit who inspired Mark as he wrote his gospel account inspire us today. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

I remember camping out at camp meeting. It was a camp meeting similar to the one we will be having at Mount Vernon Academy this summer. We lived in Virginia so our camp meeting was held at Shenandoah Valley Academy. Our family set up a tent and stayed for close to a week. Each year it was a special event. There were many other families camping out where our tent was set up, and so it was like being a part of a close community. It was also like going to a big family reunion, as we saw many friends from all over the state. Camping out was an adventure – sleeping out under the stars, cooking and eating outdoors. It was also the only time during the year when my brother and I got to hang out with so many kids our age. I remember the big swings, the slippery-slide, and of course, the ice cream stand. Big tents were set up all over the campus, where the meetings were held. There was a great big one for the adults, and then some other large ones for the different age groups. A lot of good memories of camp meeting are still with me to this day.

In our story from the book of Mark thousands of people camp out with Jesus. It must have been the best camp meeting ever. Jesus Himself was the featured speaker.

Let's begin with a summary:

After spending three days camping out with a large crowd of people in Decapolis, Jesus consulted with His disciples about having run out of food. When the disciples offered no solution, Jesus took what little food they had and told the crowd to sit down. // Using only seven loaves and a few small fish, Jesus gave His disciples enough food to feed the thousands of people. After seven baskets of extra pieces had been picked up, Jesus sent the crowd away. He and His disciples got into a boat and went across to the region of Dalmanutha.

Let's now consider what Jesus experienced in this story. First of all, He experienced consulting with His disciples. Mark 8:1 reveals the reason for this consultation - a very large multitude had gathered and they had nothing to eat. According to verse two these people had been with Jesus for three days. The idea is implied that they had had food for the first two days, but by the third day the food had run out. These three days had been like one big camp meeting. They were out in the open air. During the day they were blessed by Jesus' teaching and ministry of healing. At night they slept together under the stars. But now on the third day they had run out of food and their camp meeting seems about to come to an abrupt halt.

Under these circumstances Jesus consulted His disciples. Notice His words to them in verse 3 of Mark chapter 8 - "If I send them away..." In other words, "If I do as you suggested..." You may remember that the last time they were surrounded by a large crowd like this, who had nothing to eat. The disciples had come to Jesus near the end of the day, suggesting that Jesus should send everyone away, so they could go buy food in the surrounding villages (Mark 6:35, 36). So, in this situation in Mark chapter 8 Jesus considers with His disciples what might happen if He follows their suggestion. He proposes, then, "If I send them away hungry to their own houses, they will faint on the way." He then reminds them that some of them had come from a long way away. Jesus is near the end of a long circuitous journey through the land of Phoenicia and Decapolis. So it is possible that some of these people had followed Him from the distant cities of Tyre & Sidon or of Decapolis. After stating the predicament, Jesus pauses. Instead of coming up with a solution, He offers an unspoken invitation to His disciples to come up with a solution, other than the one they had come up with last time.

Second, Jesus experienced an insensitive response. The disciples respond by painting a rather bleak picture in the form of a question. In Mark 8:4 they ask Jesus, "How can one satisfy these (people) with bread here in the wilderness?" They offer no plausible solution. Instead, they reveal an unconcerned attitude, using a derogatory expression in reference to the people. The New King James Version quotes them as asking, "How can these people...." But people is a supplied word. The expression is the same one as the people in Nazareth used to refer to Jesus, when they discredited Him as a nobody. The disciples here in Mark 8:4 are revealing their prejudice against these non-Jewish people. Jesus has taken them on a tour through this foreign territory, in order to help them to see that all people are God's people. And yet the disciples seem no better off for it. Jesus responds to their unsympathetic response with a question - "How many loaves do you have?" He's resorting back to square one. This is the same question He asked them when He fed the 5,000. He's repeating the process, because their faith has stalled. He takes them by the hand, as if saying, "Ok, you're still newborns in the faith. Let me show you how this works, one baby step at a time." Perhaps the disciples did believe Jesus could feed all these people, but if so, they didn't want to believe that these non-Jewish people were worthy of such a miracle. In answer to Jesus' question, they replied, "Seven". Their short answer exudes frustration. It seems they're a bit snippy. And so Jesus experienced an insensitive response.

Third, Jesus experienced feeding the hungry. Once Jesus had the seven loaves, He told the crowd to "sit down on the ground" (Mark 8:6). When Jesus fed the 5,000 He told them to sit down on the "green grass". Now they sit on the ground. Some time has passed since He fed the 5,000. They are now in the dry season. The grass, which was green after the winter rains, has now dried up. Jesus then "gave thanks" for the bread. The Greek word is "eucharistia", from which we get the word, "Eucharist", a word used to describe the Last Supper. Mark 6:7 says Jesus "blessed" the small fish. There is no mention of Jesus blessing the bread on this occasion. (Perhaps, the little fish needed a little extra help from Jesus' blessing) Mark records that everyone ate and was filled. Once again, the food never ran out until the proper amount had been served. When Jesus fed the 5,000, there were 12 baskets leftover. This time Mark mentions that there were seven baskets. The New King James Version describes them as "large baskets". But large is a supplied word. The word here for basket is a different Greek word from the baskets used after the feeding of the 5,000. But there is some uncertainty as to the difference between these two types of baskets. It is possible that they were woven differently or of a different material. Mark 8:9 mentions that number of people fed was about 4,000. Matthew gives the same number in his account, but adds "besides women and children" (Matthew 15:38). So, it is likely that the total number of people was between eight and ten thousand.

Last of all, Jesus experienced going back to Galilee. Mark 8:9 mentions that Jesus "sent them away". This was the same courteous dismissal given by Jesus after feeding the 5,000. Mark 8:10 says that Jesus and His disciples then got "immediately" into the boat. Mark's purpose for his use of the word "immediately" is not entirely clear. It is certainly an expression he uses quite often in his gospel account. Perhaps it shows a sense of urgency with Jesus wanting to get across the Sea of Galilee before dark. Or perhaps Mark is simply revealing that there was no delay. As soon as the people had left, He and His disciples got into the boat. You may remember that after the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus not only sent the crowds away, but also His disciples. Jesus' refusal to be proclaimed king had alienated His disciples from Him. But it seems that this time there is no such alienation as they both get into the boat together. Mark 8:10 also mentions that Jesus and His disciples came ashore in the region of "Dalmanutha". In Matthew 15:39 it says they came to the region of "Magdala". A few other variant forms are also given in the original manuscripts, such as "Magadan". Most likely the area being referred to was the area around the town of Magdala, which was between Tiberias and Capernaum on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee.

How is Jesus revealed in this story as our example? It is God's will for each of us to be healthy and dangerous Christians, but often we don't know what that looks like in the 21st century. Jesus is how we know what a healthy and dangerous Christian looks like. He is revealed in this story as our example in that He called for sympathy. His words and actions in dealing with the disciples in Mark 8:1-3 are quite revealing. After He called them together, He expressed how He felt about the people who had now run out of food. Jesus said, "I have compassion on the multitude." And the unspoken question for the disciples to ask themselves was, "Do I have compassion for these people?" Jesus knew their prejudice against non-Jews. And He tried to awaken compassion in place of their prejudice. He also referred to these people as having been with Him for three

days. It's as if Jesus is saying, "During these last few days I have gotten attached to these people. Have you?" Then He pictures what would happen were He to send them away – "They wouldn't make it. Some of them have a long way to go to get home. They'll faint from hunger before they get there. Send them away? No, I can't do it. Don't you see how harsh that would be?"

Jesus opened up His heart to His disciples. He tried to reason with them. And He is our example in this. He shows that a healthy and dangerous Christian is someone who feels people's pain and enters into the feelings of God. How long has it been since you couldn't sleep because of someone else's problem? Most of my sleepless nights are because of my own issues. The word, "compassion", means to "suffer with". "Sympathy" means to "feel with". "Empathy" means to "feel in". All of these words describe what Jesus felt. He felt their hunger. He entered into their predicament. The most I have experienced of this has been with my children. It seemed that I was always getting sick as a child. And even as an adult, I have dreaded getting sick. And yet as I have seen my children suffer from sickness, I have actually wished that I could be sick instead of them. There is a song that spells this out so clearly by Keith Green, entitled, "Asleep in the Light". If you ever need a kick in the pants to get your focus on the needs of others instead of yourself, you might refer back to this song.

*Do you see?
Do you see?
All the people sinking down?
Don't you care?
Don't you care?
Are you gonna let them drown?*

*How can you be so numb?!
Not to care if they come!?
You close your eyes,
And pretend the job's done.*

*"Oh, bless me, Lord!
Bless me, Lord!"
You know, it's all I ever hear!
No one aches,
No one hurts,
No one even sheds one tear.
But He cries,
He weeps,
He bleeds,
And He cares for your needs.
And you just lay back
And keep soaking it in!*

Certainly these are potent words, but it gets the message across that Jesus was trying to get across to His disciples in our story. And He certainly wants us to experience His compassion, instead of our callousness.

Second, Jesus is revealed as our example in that He gave thanks for the loaves. This is a profound statement about the heart of God. He is the Creator and everything belongs to Him. And yet He felt appreciation for this small provision. Throughout the ceaseless passing of eternity past Jesus Christ had always had everything He could possibly want. And yet He never came to take anything for granted. As He looked upon those seven loaves of bread His heart was full of gratitude for God. Instead of complaining that it wasn't enough for everyone, He gave thanks. As a result, those seven loaves came to be enough to feed thousands of people.

And so Jesus shows us that a healthy Christian is someone who lives life filled with gratitude. I don't know about you, but I have spent a lot of my life worrying instead of giving thanks. I'm just beginning to realize the truth of David's psalm, which declares, "The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want." When I give myself to

God, I have everything I need. Somehow I know, despite what my circumstances are, that I'm going to be ok. Knowing that all my needs are met in Jesus Christ has liberated to feel grateful. I'm not obsessed with taking care of myself or fighting for my own needs. I am free to feel thankful for every little gift from God.

There's a story recorded only by Luke about ten lepers. They all cried out to Jesus for mercy. They all wanted to be healed. Jesus told them to go to the priests in order to have their disease examined. On their way they are cleansed. Notice what Luke records in chapter 17 of his gospel account. We'll read verses 15 and 16. All ten of these lepers were healed on their way to the priests. But only one out of the ten came back to Jesus to express gratitude. And Luke makes the point that the one who came back wasn't even a Jew. There's a horrible sin in feeling that I am entitled to God's blessings. God does not owe me anything. Whatever blessings He gives me are an act of grace. Nine former lepers left the priests healed, and yet still enslaved with feelings of ingratitude. Only one was liberated to live the rest of his life fully appreciating every minute.

I find it interesting that the people in our story ran out of food, while keeping company with the Bread of Life. Surely Jesus would have taken better care of His clients. You know, at least fix them a hot breakfast, like Hampton Inn or Holiday Inn Express. Have you ever run out of food, while in the presence of the Great Provider? It doesn't really seem such a big deal when you have the Living Bread that gives eternal life, or when you have a well of water is bursting out of you that never runs dry.

I don't think any of these people in our story were really concerned about running out of food. They were experiencing the camp meeting of their lives. It was like heaven had come down to earth. And the fact that their lunch boxes were empty didn't really seem to matter.

The things of this earth had grown strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace. The words of this song are telling –

*Oh soul, are you weary and troubled?
No light in the darkness you see?
There's light for a look at the Savior.
And life more abundant and free.*

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.*

I invite you to turn with me to our closing hymn, "Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus." We will sing all three verses.