

## “I Am Here!”

Mark 6:30-56

When the Great Commission was read a few moments ago, we heard Jesus give His disciples the formidable task of making other disciples of “all nations.” It is comforting that He tempered that massive challenge with this promise: “And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” How important is that to you, in context? When we think of the presence of Jesus we may think of that presence through our sadness or pain, and certainly, that is true. But, this most familiar promise of Christ’s presence regards the work He gave us to do. As we, His church, endeavor to gather disciples for Jesus, He is with us, empowering us. In your personal role as a witness for Jesus, He is with you. Are you strengthened knowing you are not on your own? Does that make you any more prone to speak up or stand up as a witness for Jesus?

When Jesus was rejected as a prophet in His hometown of Nazareth, Mark observed that He “could not do any miracles there.” He only laid His hands on a few sick people and made them well. I don’t know what your experiences have been, but in *Karl-world*, a Man healing diseases simply by laying His hands on people is a pretty big deal. But, if as many scholars believe, Mark was recording the Apostle Peter’s eyewitness accounts of the life of Christ, then, healing a few folks may have seemed minor compared to other remarkable things Peter had seen Jesus do. Peter was in the boat when Jesus calmed a storm with a single command. Peter witnessed the exorcism of a legion of demons from a man and then he watched as those demons stampeded a herd of pigs into the sea. Peter was there when Jesus raised a twelve-year-old girl from the dead.

There are miracles, and there are *MIRACLES*. Every healing and exorcism by Jesus was mighty beyond anything I have ever seen. On the other hand, there were other healers and exorcists of a lesser sort around. A skeptic might merely concede that Jesus was very good at what He did. Jesus calmed a storm, but all storms die down eventually. Maybe the timing of Jesus’ words was just a lucky coincidence. Maybe He did not resurrect Jairus’ daughter. Jesus Himself said she was just “asleep.” Maybe that was not a metaphor for death, just a very insightful diagnosis.

Of course, other miracles are not so easily dismissed. Sometimes, Jesus would do something too overtly divine to be explained away. Our text revolves around two such miracles; the feeding of a crowd of 5000 and Jesus’ little hike upon the surface of Lake Genessaret. These are miracle accounts that must be rejected as false, twisted to be symbolic metaphors for some other lesson or embraced as factually true. They simply do not lend themselves to naturalistic explanations.

I take the miracles at face value, so I will not explore them *per se*. I am not sure what there is to explore. When we get to them, I judge that it is better to simply follow the pattern of those who were there and stand in awe of the holiness of Jesus that these miracles disclose. That said; let us now consider the truths that these miracles teach us about the power of the presence of Jesus.

### I. The Empowering Presence of Jesus (30-34)

#### A. The Apostles Had Wielded the Power of Jesus verse 30

<sup>30</sup>The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught.

Earlier in this chapter, Jesus had sent the Twelve forth two by two into the villages of Galilee with His authority to preach, to heal and to drive out demons. Their words were His words. Their power over disease and darkness was His power. But, between the sending of the Twelve and their reporting back to Jesus, Mark records a flashback. When news of this expanded ministry of Jesus came to the attention of King Herod Antipas of Galilee, he feared that Jesus might be the reincarnation of John the Baptist, whom he had executed, an event orchestrated by his wife, the evil Herodias. She hated John because he had condemned her marriage to Antipas, for she was already the lawful wife of Antipas' brother, Herod Philip, king over the region to the northeast.

After this flashback, Mark returns to the original narrative. The "apostles" or "sent ones" report back to Jesus all that has happened on their respective tours. But, now there were six pairs of miracle-working apostles in addition to Jesus Himself, and the crowds found them all together.

### **B. The Apostles Now Tasted the Burdens of Jesus verses 31-34**

...<sup>31</sup>Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."

<sup>32</sup>So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. <sup>33</sup>But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. <sup>34</sup>When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

The demands of the crowd were so overwhelming that the disciples did not even get a chance to eat. Does that ring a bell? Mark recorded a similar detail about an overworked Jesus earlier. When Jesus called them away, He had a destination in mind, which was accessible by cutting across the corner of the lake by boat. But, the site was also accessible by running around the end of the lake. When Jesus and company arrived at their destination, a crowd had beaten them there.

Jesus had every right to be annoyed. This self-absorbed mob had crashed His retreat. But Jesus did not get annoyed. He had compassion on them and viewed them as shepherdless sheep. A sheep is not a particularly bright, hardy or self-sufficient animal. A sheep without a shepherd has no one to protect it from predators or even from the consequences of its own sheepish dumbness.

### **C. The Apostles Now Needed the Perspective of Jesus**

I read several commentaries on this passage, each touching on our need for spiritual and physical rest and rejuvenation, but don't other texts make that case better than this one? After all, this is a story of a getaway that never actually got underway. In any event, when the Apostles told Jesus of their tours throughout Galilee, maybe something didn't ring quite right. Certainly, they needed rest. We all do. But first, they may have needed to learn something about who they were and who they were not.

It was the Apostles' nature, as it is the nature of man in general, to combat pride whenever God uses him in some meaningful way. Occasionally, the Twelve needed reminders that Jesus did not need them and them only to accomplish His work. He chose to work through them. The disciples were offended when they saw a man, an outsider, driving out demons in the Name of Jesus. The sons of Zebedee thought they could call down fire on a Samaritan village that did not welcome the apostolic band. I wonder if the rebuke by Jesus that followed included the words, "Yeah, right," Peter thought he could single-handedly ward off the soldiers that came to arrest Jesus in Gethsemane. Here, the Twelve had just returned from successful tours as evangelists, healers and exorcists. Perhaps, it was a time to remind them of Who was really wielding the power.

## II. The Exclusive Power of Jesus (35-44)

### A. So Great Was a New Task at Hand, the Twelve Dismissed It verses 35, 36

<sup>35</sup>By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. "This is a remote place," they said, "and it's already very late. <sup>36</sup>Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat."

Jesus began teaching the crowd many things. The verb tense in verse 34 hints that Jesus was teaching and teaching and teaching. Mixed motives may have been at play when the disciples suggested that Jesus send the people to find food. Jesus was not annoyed at the crowds, but I cannot speak for the Twelve. In verse 35, an idiom rendered "already very late", refers to the Jews' "first evening", or about three o'clock in the afternoon. "Second evening" would come at sundown. It was well past lunchtime. The Twelve spoke the truth, but I suspect it also crossed their minds that were the crowds to finally leave, they could start their much needed retreat. Never did they imagine that Jesus intended for their small band to provide lunch for this mob.

### B. Jesus Said, "You Give Them Something to Eat." verses 37, 38

<sup>37</sup>But he answered, "You give them something to eat."

They said to him, "That would take eight months of a man's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?"

<sup>38</sup>"How many loaves do you have?" he asked. "Go and see."

When they found out, they said, "Five--and two fish."

"You give them something to eat." This brought them back down to earth, brutally reminding them of their limitations. One of them must have been pretty good at doing math in his head, calculating that a man would have to work for eight months to even provide a minimal lunch for this crowd. Their imaginations were limited by their experiences. They had healed the sick. (Of course, it wasn't really them that had healed the sick.) They had driven out demons. (Of course, it wasn't really them that had driven out demons.) It was beyond their experience and expertise to feed this crowd. (Of course, so was everything else they had done to this point.)

Jesus asked them what food was available. From John's gospel, we know that the two fish and the five loaves presented were one little boy's lunch. These loaves were made from barley, the cheapest grain in the land. Such loaves were flat and small. A man might eat several with a single meal. It's like having a slice of pizza *versus* twenty-three slices of "thin-crust" pizza. The salted fish were similar to sardines. This modest lunch was not much with which to work.

### C. Not One of the Gospel Writers Could Omit What Followed verses 39-44

<sup>39</sup>Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. <sup>40</sup>So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. <sup>41</sup>Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. <sup>42</sup>They all ate and were satisfied, <sup>43</sup>and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. <sup>44</sup>The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.

This reads like an eyewitness account. The crowd was seated "in groups," a term usually used for "garden beds". To Peter, the landscape resembled the orderly, colorful rows of a vegetable garden against a backdrop of "green grass", which in Palestine, narrows the time frame down to around March and April, somewhere in the vicinity of the Passover. There is probably no deep meaning to the "groups of hundreds and fifties" That may just have facilitated getting a count.

This is the only miracle recorded in all four Gospel records. The panorama painted across these Galilean hills is vivid, but in terms of what Jesus actually did to divide, multiply or create food, we are given no hint. We only know that He started with two fish and five loaves. And, we know this: Such a breathtaking act of power was only possible because of the presence of Jesus.

### **III. The Essential Power of Jesus (45-56)**

#### **A. Jesus Soon Found His Disciples Striving into the Wind verses 45-48a**

<sup>45</sup>Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. <sup>46</sup>After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray.

<sup>47</sup>When evening came, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. <sup>48</sup>He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them.

John's gospel reveals why Jesus sent His disciples to Bethsaida with such urgency. This miracle was so remarkable that the people were ready to rise up against the occupying Romans and place Jesus on the throne in Jerusalem. The Twelve were confused enough about God's Kingdom without getting caught in the middle of a badly-planned revolt. Jesus sent them away, dismissed the crowd and went to a mountain. When He came down, the second evening had passed. It was now dark. From the beach, moonlight illuminated the lake before Him. To cross the lake was only a four-mile trip, but there, in full view, was the boat with the Twelve "straining" (or torturing) against the wind. This went on for hours. They rowed and rowed, but got nowhere.

You've heard about the man who landed a job painting the yellow lines by hand down the center of the highway. After three days, the foreman complained, "I thought you were going to work out. You painted three miles of line on your first day, but the second day, you only did half that, you did even worse today. I'm going to have to let you go. On his way out, the newly terminated employee complained, "It wasn't my fault. Every day I got farther from the paint can."

#### **B. Jesus Joined Them, and the World Grew Still verses 48b-52**

... About the fourth watch of the night he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, <sup>49</sup>but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, <sup>50</sup>because they all saw him and were terrified.

Immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." <sup>51</sup>Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, <sup>52</sup>for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.

On a trip to the Holy Land, Mark Twain and his wife were staying in Tiberius on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. One moonlit night, Twain got the romantic idea of taking his wife for a boat ride. At the pier, he asked a man in a rowboat how much he would charge to row them out on the water. Twain was dressed in his usual white suit. The oarsman, assuming him to be a wealthy American rancher, said, "Well, I guess about twenty-five dollars." Twain thanked him, and, turning away with his wife on his arm, was heard to exclaim, "Now I know why Jesus walked!"

Jesus watched the futility of the Twelve for several hours. We are most teachable when our own strength is gone. At the "fourth watch of the night," or about 3:00 A.M., He walked to them on the water's surface. They were terrified. Go figure. Matthew adds that on this occasion, Peter ventured out toward Jesus on the water, only to become distracted by the wind and to sink. Mark via Peter, does not mention this. A.T. Robertson suggests, "Perhaps Peter was not fond of telling that story."

The miracle of Jesus walking on water is an incredible display of the mastery of Jesus over nature. There is not much to say about the miracle. We need only stand in worshipful adoration.

But, there is a powerful lesson to be drawn. Jesus said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." The wind died down when He joined them. This amazed them, in part, because it was amazing, but also, because their hearts had been too hard to grasp the lesson of loaves, which is this: Disciples are utterly, desperately dependent on Jesus. Without Him, we merit no standing in the kingdom. We can accomplish nothing of eternal, enduring kingdom consequence on our own. The disciples had administered the big feeding program from the previous afternoon. They did the legwork. Maybe, given their successes in their missionary tours, they had begun to think of themselves as indispensable cogs in this mighty movement of God. In reality, Jesus' presence makes all the difference, and that became apparent when Jesus came to them across the water.

### **C. The Ministry that Followed Was Once Again Remarkable** verses 53-56

<sup>53</sup>When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. <sup>54</sup>As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. <sup>55</sup>They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. <sup>56</sup>And wherever he went -into villages, towns or countryside--they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed.

They still didn't get their retreat. Perhaps, the wind had steered them off course, causing them to arrive in Gennesaret, a few miles south of Bethsaida, but the scene was the same: more people, more human need. Still, what transpired there reminds us that as important as physical rest is, nothing is more important than the spiritual Sabbath that *IS* the Person and the presence of Jesus.

Jesus loves His own as brothers. By grace, He calls us His friends. But, as far as this great work is concerned, always remember who are the servants and to Whom belongs the seat of power:

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." - John 15:5