



Central Peninsula Church

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Luke 9:10–17
Mark Mitchell
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God's Work in God's Way

SERIES: *A Savior for All People*

A few years back a movie came out that has become a family favorite of ours. *What About Bob* is the story of a rather insecure and self-centered psychiatrist, played by Richard Dreyfus, named Dr. Leo Marvin. Dr. Marvin has just written a book he's rather proud of, called "Baby Steps," which is kind of a self-help book that has been successful enough to land him an interview on *Good Morning America*. The plot develops as he's visited by one last neurotic patient before he departs on a much needed vacation with his family. This patient, named Bob and played by Bill Murray, is so taken with Dr. Marvin's groundbreaking ideas that he follows him all the way to Lake Winneposake where Dr. Marvin is trying to get some rest and relaxation. Dr. Marvin, of course, fumes over this intrusion, but his family kind of likes Bob. The fact is, he ends up being more fun to have around than Leo.

The first time I saw that movie I didn't think it was all that funny because I saw a lot of myself in Leo Marvin. I could relate to wanting to take a vacation from people and their needs. It's actually a common problem for people in any kind of so-called "helping profession." Your job is to help people, but after a while you resent the very people you're trying to help, and find yourself trying to avoid them. Part of the problem is you just don't feel like you have anything left to give. You're like a slot machine with no money in it. People keep putting in nickels and pulling the handles; the little pictures come up but nothing of substance comes out because you're empty.

Of course, no one faced as many demands upon his own life as Jesus. We've been watching Jesus for some time in the Gospel of Luke and he seems almost tireless in his availability to people. And then last week we saw that he took an important step – he sent out his 12 disciples on their first ever mission. They were given the authority and power to preach and heal just like Jesus. What they didn't understand is that when they returned, all flushed from their success, Jesus had a whole new lesson for them to learn about doing God's work in God's way. It started with an opportunity to get away.

I. He invites us to withdraw with him.

Look at v.10. **"When the apostles returned, they gave an account to Him of all that they had done. Taking them with Him, He withdrew by Himself to a city called Bethsaida."** Notice that Luke calls them "apostles" here, which he normally doesn't do. The word means "sent ones" and they're called that here because they were just sent out and now they've come back to report on how things went. I'm sure it was an exciting meeting with lots of adrenaline pumping! But beneath the excitement Jesus sensed the need to pull them away, to be alone with them. So he plans a little vacation on the north side of the lake. They withdrew to Bethsaida, but they didn't stay in the city. In v. 12 Luke says they went to a "desolate place," no doubt outside of the hustle and bustle of the city.

Why did Jesus do that? Why did he plan a retreat for them? In Mark's gospel he tells us that there were many people coming and going and they didn't even have time to eat, so Jesus said to them, **"Come away by yourselves to a secluded spot and rest awhile"** (Mark 6:31). They were being "peopled to death" and Jesus sensed that this was dangerous. And so he invites his men to withdraw with him and rest. Notice that this is a rest initiated by Jesus. I doubt these men saw this as the next thing on their list of things to do, and we rarely do either. But Jesus knows what we need. He sees beneath the surface of our restless activity and he invites us to come away with him. Do you ever feel an inner nudge to stop, to slow down, to get away and just be with the Lord? Could that be the Lord nudging us? We need to listen to that.

Notice that Jesus was intentional about this. You have to make a decision to withdraw from what may appear to be very real needs around you. You have to say no to a few things. You have to get away. In this case, Jesus takes them to a desolate place, which means it was in the wilderness. It may seem like a strange place to rest, but every Jew would recall that during Israel's history God had provided rest for his people in the wilderness. Here Jesus invites the new Israel to rest in the same place. He didn't send them off to Club Med for a two week vacation while he stuck around and did his Savior

thing. The point was to be with HIM. Two years ago I went by myself to Montana; not the beautiful part of Montana but a barren and desolate part of Montana called the Missouri Breaks. I had one of the most restful times of my life. It wasn't the scenery, it was the Lord. Sometimes our vacations wear us out so much that we need a vacation from our vacations! The idea here is just to get away and be with him. Sometimes the church wears us out. Someone once wrote, "Mary had a little lamb, 'Twas given her to keep. But then she joined the local church, and died for lack of sleep." We need to be careful. Even God's work done in God's power can be dangerous if we don't learn to get away with him and rest.

Philip Keller, once a shepherd himself, says that the strange thing about sheep is that it's impossible for them to be made to rest unless four requirements are met. They must be free from all fear; they must be free from friction with other sheep; they must be free from flies; and they can't be hungry. Keller concludes that only a shepherd can create those conditions. Without a shepherd, it's impossible to really rest. Jesus is the good shepherd. Without Jesus, you can go on vacation, but you won't find rest.

II. He teaches us to welcome interruptions.

But things don't always turn out as expected. Look what happens next. **"But the crowds were aware of this and followed Him; and welcoming them, He began speaking to them about the kingdom of God and curing those who had need of healing"** (v.11). It was about four miles to Bethsaida by boat and about eight miles by foot. So when the people saw the apostles and Jesus sail north, many began to make the trek along the edge of the lake. Others from lake shore villages likely joined them, so that thousands of people converged on the retreat sight.

Can you imagine the irritation of the apostles as they approached the shoreline? Now ready for some rest and relaxation with Jesus, they couldn't believe their eyes. More people; more needs; more work. But notice Jesus. Instead of irritation, he welcomes them. And he begins to serve them. He does the same two things he had sent the apostles out to do the day before – he preached about the kingdom and he healed those who were sick.

Why does Jesus do that? I mean, he was the one who wanted to get away. He was the one who led them to

withdraw. Why doesn't he send the crowd away? I think Jesus is modeling something for the disciples. He's teaching them that what might seem to us as interruptions, might actually be opportunities for ministry that the Lord wants us to respond to. It comes down to whether or not we give God the right to interrupt our agenda; whether we're willing to surrender to his agenda.

About two weeks ago I was here at work, preparing my message for the week. Like I often do, I brought a few books with me and went out to lunch to a place where I could not only eat but kind of hide out and study for a change of scenery. So I found a place and hunkered down in a booth when a guy walked by who I hadn't seen in several years. Now, to be honest, my first reaction was to hide behind a book. The last thing I wanted to do was waste my lunch hour talking to someone! But somehow our eyes met and we said hello and we started talking and we ended up eating lunch together. In the midst of our conversation he told me that just recently he had prayed that God would give him the opportunity to talk to me about some things that were heavy on his heart. Remember, I hadn't seen this guy for years! I realized that the Lord had a different agenda for me during that lunch than I did. As far as I was concerned, people were an intrusion, but apparently to God people are the priority. That's what Jesus demonstrates here. That's what he was modeling for the disciples.

III. He places us in situations where we don't have what it takes.

And apparently Jesus kept ministering for hours. The shadows began to lengthen and the people were no doubt getting hungry. Look what happens next. **"Now the day was ending, and the twelve came and said to Him, 'Send the crowd away, that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside and find lodging and get something to eat; for here we are in a desolate place'"** (v. 12). This was probably one of those deals where THEY were the ones who were hungry, but they didn't want to say that so they say, "Jesus, these poor folks must be getting hungry!" And so, they proceed to tell Jesus what he should do next: send them all in to town where they can find a place to eat and sleep for the night.

Now that's a reasonable thing to say. But it's interesting that after all this time with Jesus, seeing him do miracle upon miracle, they can't come up with anything better than that. This becomes even more apparent in what happens next. **"YOU give them something to eat."** Jesus was always saying things like that. In the original language, the "you" is emphasized – **"YOU give them something to eat."** The disciples shoot back, **"We have**

no more than five loaves and two fish, unless perhaps we go and buy food for these people.” You can sense the sarcasm in their voice, especially considering what Luke tells us next in v.14, **“For there were about five thousand men.”** You see, the apostles are good at math. “Five plus two equals seven, Jesus. The numbers just don’t add up here.”

I want you to notice what Jesus has done here, and he’s done it on purpose. He’s firmly established that they DON’T have what it takes to meet the need. We know and Jesus knew that he had every intention of meeting that need, but the first thing he does is show them that they don’t have what it takes. Have you ever been in a situation where the Lord is calling you to do something but you know you don’t have what it takes? What do you do in that situation? Do you try to pretend like you have what it takes? Do you run away? Do you blame others for getting you into this mess? Do you try to figure it out and fix the problem like these disciples?

It’s Father’s Day. I love Father’s Day because I get served all day long. This afternoon I’ll lay on the couch and watch the US Open and people will bring me whatever I want. But let’s face it, the reason why you get to do that is because for the other 364 days a year you’re on call. Being a father is not easy. You have to provide for your family. You have to love your wife as Christ loved the church. You have to spend time with your kids and be a positive role model to them. And some of you dads never had a very good role model for this, which makes it even more difficult. It’s wonderful but it’s no walk in the park to be a dad. And there will be times when the Lord will intentionally show you that you don’t have what it takes. What do you do then?

IV. He uses us to meet needs.

The best thing to do is whatever he tells you to do. You see, he doesn’t bring us to that helpless state to mock us. He still wants to use us to meet the need, but he wants us dependent on him. God’s work gets done in God’s way when we don’t have what it takes but we depend on him to give us what it takes. All of this is seen in what Jesus does next.

“And He said to His disciples, ‘Have them sit down to eat in groups of about fifty each.’ They did so, and had them all sit down. Then He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed them, and broke them, and kept giving them to the disciples to set before the people” (vv. 14b–16).

First, Jesus has them sit down in groups of 50. We don’t exactly know why he told them to do this. It might have just been

a way of organizing the distribution. It might have been another reminder that something was going on here akin to Israel out in the wilderness. Remember how Jethro told Moses to organize Israel into groups of 50? And what did God provide the Israelites with out there in the wilderness? What came down from heaven? This scene is starting to look strangely familiar!

The second thing he does is take the five loaves and two fish and gives thanks for them and breaks them. Notice he takes what they did have and uses it to supply what they didn’t have. Even though they didn’t have enough, what they DID have was offered up to him, and when it was offered up to him it became more than enough. In the hands of Jesus, the fish and chips just keep on coming. God provided for Israel in the wilderness as bread came down out of heaven. Now bread comes not from heaven but from Jesus who came from heaven. Jesus multiplies the molecular structure of barley cakes and pickled perch. It’s the miracle of creation all over again.

But there is something even greater here. It’s not what he did; it’s how he did it. Did you notice? He did it by using the disciples. He uses them to distribute the bread – back and forth, between Jesus and the crowd, they raced. It would have been very tedious to feed that many people. I mean, it would have far more impressive to just snap his fingers and have a box lunch show up in everyone’s lap. This way we’re not even sure if the crowd knew it was a miracle. They probably thought Peter had driven his catering truck back to Bethsaida – Pete’s Fish and Chips! But it was a miracle, a miracle that employed the disciples to feed the crowd.

Lynn and I were on the receiving end of this principle three weeks ago around the time of our daughter’s wedding. God provided things for us that we would never have been able to do ourselves. But how did he do it? He used people. Someone who runs a hair salon said that he would have all the bridesmaids hair taken care of the day of the wedding. Someone else said they wanted to take care of the bouquets. Someone else had our out-of-town guests at their house. Someone else volunteered to do the wedding video. It goes on and on. When it was all over, Lynn and I said, that was a God-thing. And it was, but God used people to get it done; people who were willing to give what they had to meet needs.

V. He satisfies us with more than enough.

And when we do that, when we allow God to use us

like that, sometimes I think we're the beneficiaries. Look at v.17. **"And they all ate and were satisfied; and the broken pieces which they had left over were picked up, twelve baskets full."** Five thousand men, which means perhaps 10,000 people in all, ate and were satisfied. That's quite a feast. Not only that, they have 12 baskets left over – one for each disciple.

These 12 apostles still hadn't gotten their rest, but as they munched their food they must have had a satisfaction of the soul that was far more enduring. Jesus satisfies our soul like nothing else. Each of us has a soul craving that food or friends or family or vacations cannot satisfy. Only the bread Jesus gives can satisfy that hunger. Only by allowing him to use us the way the disciples did can we really experience that satisfaction.

This is what the disciples would learn later on. We know that this event took place in the spring, probably around mid April. For the Jews that meant it was Passover season. A year later, Jesus would be in the upper room with his disciples for the Passover meal, and in language hauntingly similar to v.16, he would look up to heaven, bless the bread, break it and then pass it out to the disciples, saying, "This is my body, broken for you." It's no mistake that in the very next section, starting in v. 18, Jesus begins to talk about his identity in relation to his death. It would be through his own broken body that life would be offered to all.

CONCLUSION

So what was the "take away" for the disciples that day? What did they learn? No doubt they learned some things about Jesus. Last week in vv. 7-9 we saw that Herod wondered, "Who then is this?" In v.18 Jesus will ask his disciples, "Who do the people say that I am?" Well, here in this event, they got the answer to that question, and so do we. This is not just another prophet or teacher; this is the One who, like the God of old, supplies bread for his people in the wilderness.

But that's not all they learned; now is it all we can learn. We also learn how the bread of life actually gets distributed to the world. He uses us. He says to each of us today in whatever circumstances we're in and whatever challenges we're facing: "You give them something to eat." He says that not because we have what it takes. If you do the math we DON'T have what it takes. But take what you have, offer it to him, and then stick around and see what he does through you. God's work gets done in God's way when we don't have what it takes but we depend on him to give us what it takes.

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