

We come to a very famous text. It's a text that I think a lot of us are familiar with in regard to Jesus' Miracles. This is one of the more famous ones. And one of the problems when we come to a text like this, is that familiarity breeds unfamiliarity.

When we come to a text that we're familiar with, we tend to presuppose what we understand about this story. And so one of the tasks that we have to constantly do is bring an openness to realize what the text is actually saying, which could be different than what maybe I've transported onto it or assumed what the meaning of the text is.

Well, that's layered with another problem that we have when we read scripture is we tend to atomize texts. We break them into these small chunks, which is good and important, and necessary. That's what expository preaching does. I don't know of a better way to preach than that, but the shadow side to that is we can, at times, lose the forest for the trees.

We get so close to it that we forget it is part of a larger story. And so when we come to this particular text, what I want to do is help us see that this, mirrored with Dan's text last week, is all one large section. But it would've taken an hour and a half to preach through, so we had to break it up into smaller sections.

And that large section is a part of the Gospel of Mark. What is Mark communicating through the way in which he's writing this account of Jesus' life? Well, if you remember, way back when we started, we said that the central thesis of Mark's gospel is that the Kingdom of Heaven has come near. The Kingdom of God has come near.

And so last week, Dan talked about how the disciples have gone out. Now they're beginning to do the work of the Kingdom of God, and they're facing resistance because that's what happens when you present a counter kingdom to the way in which the world is.

And so you see this resistance. The disciples go out; they're healing, they're preaching, they're casting out demons. They're doing all this work that they had just seen Jesus do. They're carrying on the work of their rabbi as a good apprentice will do. And then you see this interlude where we get this really theatrical dramatic story of John the Baptist.

Quite literally, his head lands on a platter. Herod murders this prophet of God, and the Kingdom of God receives all sorts of tension and resistance. What I want to make sure to note is that the meal that King Herod served last week in that text right before this one is intentionally put in contrast to the meal that Jesus is bringing to the five thousand.

We have to hold that Mark is clearly putting these stories in this manner so we can think through what is different about the meal in the

Kingdom of God. What is different about the meal of Jesus? And what we're going to see is this familiar story.

This text is actually about a revolution. It's about Jesus launching a counter-revolution to that of Herod. What we see in this crowd is actually a completely different type of revolution than King Herod. Remember, Herod was drunk on his own power, drunk on his own authority, and so with the fallout of his power and his revolution is death and murder and licentiousness and all of this trail of brokenness because Herod's revolution starts and brings death for the sake of others.

But what we see in this text is Jesus is bringing this new revolution that actually does involve death, but it brings life through death. It's a radically different, surprising alternative type of revolution.

Jesus inaugurates a different kingdom; in some ways, he redefines what victory looks like, and you're going to see that right here in the text. You're going to see it presented right here in this alternative type of meal. It's about a different power. It's about a different type of authority.

Why do we see this resistance to the Kingdom of God? Why, if Mark is putting these stories in contrast to one another, what is it about the way of Jesus that's constantly causing this resistance? You tend not to just kill people for loving everybody. But there's something going on in which the Kingdom of God is calling out; it's provoking the kingdoms of this world by saying there's a different way in which we understand what it means to be human and operate in this world. That the ways of this world are broken, and the revolutions of this world are broken.

So when Jesus then presents a counter alternative to that, the powers that be get a little frustrated; they get a little irritated because it's threatening. It's threatening the way they understand the world.

Mark 6 is the familiar text we are in. But maybe we'll see something that we have glossed over. We'll see that Mark is doing something different. So Mark chapter 6:30 says. *"The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught."* This is after they'd gone out on a mission trip. They're coming back. They're sharing stories about all that God had done. It's important to remember that this is filling their imagination of the Kingdom of God in all of these movements of God.

*"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'" (v. 31).* So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. Now, if you've been tracking with us, you're probably familiar with the Greek word *eremos*, which is the solitary place, the quiet place. One of Jesus' favorite places. And you see that here again, Jesus is oscillating from work and ministry and then escaping away to the *eremos*. Mark uses this word three times. You see it right here in verse

31. "So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place" (v. 32). That's the same Greek word *eremos*. Again, Jesus is presenting a rhythm of life, work and rest, work and rest. Later on, Mark uses *eremos* again in a few verses where the disciples then say that this is in a remote place, an *eremos*. So again, this is the DNA of Jesus.

**But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. 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. vv. 33-34**

So he began teaching them many things. They were trying to get away, but the people that apparently watched them, I imagine they're running along the side of the lake watching Jesus cross over, and they get there before the boat even lands. But notice Jesus' response, "he had compassion on them."

Now we have to ask ourselves why is there 5,000 men there. I mean, this would've been odd. The place in which the boat is traveling is this remote outskirts of the empire. It's this remote area where you now land, and 5,000 people are there. Certainly, there are some who are just trying to get around and be by Jesus, but this is an odd crowd. And so why? What do we know about this crowd?

The text says in verse 44 again that there are 5,000 men who had eaten. There are two ways you can look at this. Some scholars believe that the reference just to men was because it's a patriarchal society, and so they wouldn't have mentioned the women and the children. There's potential that it's an even larger crowd, a much larger crowd. That could be the case, but that's reading into the text slightly. Another understanding, which I think might hold some more validity, is that the 5,000 men are there because the men were ready for revolution. See, where Jesus and the disciples are landing is Zealot country. The Zealots were people who believed that they needed to take up arms and have a violent revolution against Rome because Rome was oppressing the people of God. They're living in occupied land, and the Romans have their boot right on their throat over and over.

So the Zealots were a religious group that believed they needed to take up arms against Rome. There was a select part of the Zealots that were known as the Sicarii, and they would carry daggers inside their cloaks. They would walk around these large group settings, and at times they'd pull their daggers out, stab Roman officials, hide their daggers back in their cloaks, and then disappear into the anonymity of the group.

See, the Zealot country where Jesus lands is a hotbed for Revolution. It's where people are landing, and they want to start something. They're ready to rise up. They see Jesus' power and authority, and they say, "Maybe this is the one."

This is one of those miracles that lands in all of the gospels. And so I want to just point out that in John's gospel, he makes this a little more explicit. In John 6:15, it says, in the same story, "Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself." The crowd is hungry for revolution. They're hungry to

fight back. They're hungry to storm Rome. They're hungry to take back their land. They're done and tired of being oppressed. Jesus sees this in John's account. He lands on that shore. He sees this crowd, and he says, "They're trying to make me king by force." They're imposing this onto him.

I think this is what's going on in this text, and there's another illusion to it where we see when Jesus says this phrase in Mark 6:34, "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." Now we rightfully look at this, and we see this as a pastoral quality, which is absolutely true. There's a dimension of that where Jesus is a pastoral presence to them. And he's wanting to guide, protect, and guard his people.

But this particular phrase, sheep without a shepherd, is actually very familiar throughout the Old Testament. It's quoted at different times. Most likely, Jesus is quoting Numbers 27:15-17. It's the transition in which Moses, who's been leading the people of God out of Egypt into the wilderness, is about to die. It's Moses' prayer.

**Moses said to the Lord, "May the Lord, the God who gives breath to all living things, appoint someone over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the Lord's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd." Number 27:15-17**

See Moses' prayer right before his death is the people need a leader. And Moses, at this point, is a political, social, military leader for the nation of Israel. And as he's about to die, he says, "We need someone to lead these people. God, would you bring someone." Who, of course, becomes Joshua. And I think what Jesus is referencing here is he's picking up on these revolutionary themes beneath the surface. He says they will be sheep without a shepherd. They're looking for a new Moses. They're looking for a new Joshua. And what's interesting is Jesus' response, which is he had compassion on them.

See, what's interesting about Jesus' response is our gut says that Jesus wouldn't be that revolutionary leader, but it actually doesn't say he dismisses that. It says he had compassion on them. And the word compassion is a really interesting Greek word. It's this word that quite literally means moved in your bowels. It's pretty visceral. It's graphic. It says that in the inner parts of Jesus, he's moved because he sees their affliction. He sees these people who are broken, who are being oppressed, who are not living the way in which God would have for all of creation. And it says he's moved down in his gut. It says he has compassion for these people.

Jesus sees this crowd, hungry for revolution, and he actually says, "I will be that leader." But what we're going to find is he brings about a radically different revolution. He brings one that, yes, liberates all of creation at some point. We read that in Romans 8, where creation is crying out for the people of God to be restored so that the tumult and the brokenness of all of creation is eventually resolved.

But he says that there's a deeper ache as well that they were enslaved by. And he is saying that he's going to bring liberation to their very soul as well. The sin and the brokenness and death and all of its friends that are tormenting them, he said that he is going to bring liberation to their very human hearts as well. Jesus says that the people rightly identify the brokenness of creation, but they've missed that there are these two parts to it. It's out there, but it's also in our hearts. We need a revolution of our hearts. We need our sins and our brokenness dealt with as well.

Jesus is going to step into this. He will, in fact, be that alternative Moses, that different Joshua, but look at what he says at the end of verse 34. *"When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd."* And so, what's the first thing Jesus does to start this revolution? It says, "So he began teaching them many things." Now, if you're starting a worldly revolution, this usually isn't the first thing you start. You're training them in arms. You're taking up the weaponry. You're figuring out how to sort out the armory in which to train the soldiers for battle.

Jesus' first step is actually to bring the word. It is to begin teaching them. And what is Jesus teaching about? What's the thesis? What's the thing which Jesus has come to teach the whole world about? Well, it's exactly what he said at the beginning of the gospel—the Kingdom of God. He says he's coming, and so the first move Jesus makes is to bring them the word.

And then he gives them bread, word and bread, teaching and bread. Now, what's interesting about the idea of "word," is we also recognize that Jesus himself, according to John, is the Word. Through Jesus, you are brought to life. And so Jesus begins this revolution, but it starts on a different foot than we're used to because Jesus' model of liberation is to bring word and bread. It's to bring faith and deed. It's both of these things together that Jesus is bringing about.

He's saying, "This is how we begin, not with taking up arms, but something radically different. It's a different revolution. Case in point, here we are 2000 years later, all celebrating this revolution of Jesus every single Sunday. There was something about this that worked because Jesus understood what the human condition desperately needed. It needed word, and it needed bread. For the first century, bread was indicative of life. It meant they knew where their next meal was coming from. Think of Jesus as the next Moses. Think of Moses leading the people in the wilderness. What does God send them? He sends them bread. He sends them manna from heaven. It was life. It was sustenance.

See for Jesus when he sees this crowd, he says, "I understand the affliction you have, and I'm bringing you life. I'm bringing you the revolution that your heart desires and longs for." He says, "This is the way in which it begins." See where Herod brought death. Jesus brings life. Think of Jesus when he is tempted in the wilderness by Satan. *"Jesus answered, 'It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4). "Jesus said to them, 'Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven'" (John 6:32).* Jesus is not only interested in satisfying their physical hunger, but he's saying you

have a spiritual hunger that you're trying to satisfy, and I can answer that as well.

**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. Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." But he answered, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "That would take more than half a year's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?" "How many loaves do you have?" he asked. "Go and see." Mark 6:35-38**

It's interesting because the disciples actually ask a question or propose a solution, which I think most of us would. A crowd of 5,000 at minimum. It's getting late. They haven't eaten yet. Well, it's probably easier if they just send them away. But what's interesting is they had just been on this missionary trip where they had seen the movement of the Kingdom of God, but their solution is very much a worldly solution. It's a financial solution. It's just to let them deal with it on their own. They'll buy their own food, whatever it is, just allow the people to go, dismiss them.

Jesus, this shepherd of sheep or of this sheepfold, says, "No, you've missed it." He says, "The Kingdom of God, what we're talking about, means we care for the other." He told them to take care of this. It isn't their problem. Jesus then asked them how much food do they have? And they make this odd request that seems like it's actually a bit of hyperbole. They said it would take half a year's wages to feed all these people, which most scholars think was most definitely an exaggeration.

Jesus told them to go check and see what they got. They come back with five loaves and two fish, which I think would be a funny scene to watch. By the way, I imagine the disciples are a bit puffed up. They're like, "What's Jesus going to do with this? We got five loaves. Are we going to divide into literally a thousand pieces each loaf and hand that out to people?" But Jesus takes this, and he begins to enlist the disciples in the kingdom work. Because at this point, he could just tell the disciples to move over, and he would start giving everyone bread.

But I love that Jesus invites them in because if Jesus is beginning a revolution out here in the hillside country, he's showing that it's not just about him manifesting power. He says, "It's actually about your involvement." You see, Jesus gives the word and bread, and then he teaches his disciples how to also distribute those things because we are called to participate in this. It would appear that when Jesus takes the food, it says he divides the two fish, and then the disciples go and pass it out. It's almost as if the miraculous power of Jesus did not go forth until the disciples went. And so they believed in it and began to distribute that. Somehow in that, Jesus begins to multiply the loaves and the fish.

It is the miraculous power of Jesus alone, but it is through the working and obedience, and faith of the disciples, although meager and unqualified as they were. But Jesus still works. He still operates.

**Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat**

down in groups of hundreds and fifties. 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 distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand. Mark 6:39-44

So Jesus directs them. They sit in these groups, which most scholars believe is that it was very similar to what military groupings would look like—50s and 100s. Again, Jesus is presenting a counter-revolution. So he has the people sit, and then he begins to walk around and give out food.

Now let's talk about miracles for a second. Most of us think of miracles as displays of Jesus' naked power. We view them as spectacles. We view them like miracles are just God demonstrating his strength and power, which certainly they are. I'm not saying that it's not a demonstration. But there's more to miracles than just a naked display of power. That is a very modern way of looking at it. Like if Jesus does this, that will attract all the people to come to him, but the crowd is already there.

What miracles are doing is they are actually manifesting the new creation to come into the present. We live right now in the overlap of the old creation and the Kingdom of God. When Jesus says that the Kingdom of God is at hand, what he's talking about is that future hope we have of all of Earth recreated or restored and renewed and brought back where there's no more death, no more sickness, and no more illness. The Kingdom of God has now come into the present, and we live in this overlap of the old creation and new creation. We're right in the middle.

While the miracles are manifestations of Jesus' power, they're not just to display that; they are to display the redemptive purpose of his power. And so when Jesus manifests the food, and he begins to distribute it to the people, he's doing that because, in the new creation, no one will go hungry. When he heals the sick, it's because, in the new creation, there is no sickness. He's bringing into the present the new creation. A hope that's been spoken about throughout the entire Old Testament. The fancy \$10 word for this is it's a proleptic event. He's bringing the future into the present by the very power of his own working.

Listen to the way a German theologian, Jurgen Moltmann, talks about this in his book, *The Way of Jesus Christ*.

**When Jesus expels demons and heals the sick, he's driving out of creation the powers of destruction and is healing and restoring created beings who are hurt and sick. The lordship of God to which the healings witness restores creation to health. Jesus' healings are not supernatural miracles in the natural world. They are the only truly 'natural' thing in a world that is unnatural, demonized, and wounded...Finally, with the resurrection of Christ, the new creation begins, pars pro toto [That means like as one element, which represents the whole.]**

## with the crucified one. Jurgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*

See what Moltmann's getting at, what Jesus is doing here, and what Jesus does in the miracles is most of us; when we think of them as spectacles, we think that Jesus transcends the laws of physics and suspends the natural order in which to do this. But it's quite the opposite. If creation began good and beautiful and perfect. If creation ends good, beautiful, and perfect, then the thing that is unnatural is sin and death.

When Jesus rises up out of that grave, he's expelling the darkness, as he's saying that this is the natural order in which things were supposed to be, and so the miracles manifest that. They bring about the goodness of creation. He doesn't suspend the natural order. He actually brings it more to light. Evil is that which does not belong. Evil is that which God is expelling out.

This new creation begins with the crucified one coming out of the grave. See, Jesus' revolution is about this miraculous demonstration of the very bread that satisfies our physical and our spiritual longing. It is about new creation being ripped from the future and into the present. Jesus says that it's here, and we are all invited to live according to that reality. We no longer have to just submit to the powers of darkness, but we can live according to that reality. That is the people that we are. That is the revolution of Jesus. It's one that comes from the future, if you will, and into the present, and we then reorder our lives accordingly.

Jesus, in this moment, is repudiating the liberation models of the day. He's saying that the Zealots, the Pharisees, the Romans, they all had this vision of life, this vision of revolution, and he's repudiating those models, and he says, "The way in which we actually bring this about is through death." And you see it right there in verse 41. *"Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves."* In Greek, it's literally he blesses and breaks.

Now, if you fast forward a few chapters in Mark 14, Jesus is in the upper room with his disciples. It's the last meal before he'd be arrested and killed. And what he does at that meal is he takes the bread, and the exact same two verbs that are used here in Mark 6 are there in Mark 14. Jesus, around the communion table, around the Eucharist, he blesses and breaks the bread. See, Jesus' revolution is built on the Eucharist; it's built on Jesus blessing his enemies and breaking for them.

When Jesus is on the cross in the Gospel of John, he looks at his enemies, and he says, *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."* And then what does he do? He breaks, he blesses his enemies, and then he breaks. And what's different, what's shocking, and startling about Jesus' revolution is that it's not that from death we conquer and achieve, but rather it's through Jesus' death, when the world looked like it had won, when all the violent structures and the powers of darkness thought they had finally squelched out Jesus. It's at that moment that he rises from the grave and he says, "No longer do we have to adhere to the myth of redemptive violence." He says there's a different way. And when Jesus comes out of that tomb, he inaugurates a new creation.

Right in the midst of this one, he blesses his enemies, and then he breaks for them, he blesses, and he breaks. And it's through word and bread, through blessing and breaking, that this new story of Jesus takes root. It's the ultimate exodus that we all long for. It's the exodus that we recognize I cannot overcome the condition of my own heart and soul. I need something. I need a Eucharistic revolution. I need someone else to stand in my place. And so Jesus, at this moment, in Mark 6, is alluding to what he'll do at the end in Mark 14. It's when we looked to Jesus, which the disciples are figuring out. They're not there yet, and we're just like them. We're trying to navigate this whole thing.

Post the resurrection, the disciples start to get it, and they say it was through his death, the death that we couldn't do, that we find the very Bread of Life. It's in the soil of violent hunger for revolution out in the hill country on the side where these people have this good impulse that there's been injustice. And they want to take up arms, to conquer. They want to use the same tools that the revolutions of the world around them have used to get back to where they want to be. And Jesus says, "No, there's a different way."

It's Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, where one of his disciples pulls his sword out to cut the ear off of someone that came to arrest him, who says, "Put the sword. It's not how we go about this. There's a different way." And he heals the man's ear. He says that if one lives by the sword, one will die by the sword. So every revolution has sought power.

Jesus' revolution is about a different understanding of power. It's what Paul would say in 2 Corinthians that it is through weakness that our power is made perfect. See, it is a completely flipped backward model. And if we are to join that revolution, we have to look to Jesus and accept his work on the cross as the only thing that can satisfy and fix our broken hearts, that can bring us the Word and the Bread of Life.

But then don't forget Jesus' other teaching. That if you want to follow me, you must take up your cross. When Jesus enlists the disciples to start distributing the bread, he's saying that this is the way you operate in the world through a Eucharistic revolution. And what Dan brought out last week is that every one of those disciples would eventually be put to death for their belief because they're espousing that certain ethic.

Church, I think the problem that we have when we interact with the culture around us is we tend to think that the problems of this world are so important that we have to get off of our cross and do whatever it takes to solve them. But to do that is to betray the Kingdom of God. And so when we resort to influence the world in worldly manners, in ways other than what is represented by the cross, we betray the Kingdom of God. Because Jesus says, "This is how the Kingdom of God operates, utterly different than the world around us." He says, "The Kingdom of God operates on blessing and breaking, on loving our enemies and laying our life down for others."

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

I want to suggest that there is no issue that our world faces now that is so urgent and pressing that we have to get off of our crosses to solve it. I believe that the resurrection power of Jesus is already doing that healing work. What we do is we go out as Jesus did. Not being the Savior. We're not that. That's Jesus. But the way in which we go about the world is not through power over, through coercion, not through the revolutions that were out in the hill countries around Galilee, but rather we go about blessing and breaking.

Yes, it will be difficult. Yes, it will be uncomfortable. But that's the story. This is what you do. Take this bread and do this in remembrance of him. Jesus says to take this story, take this idea of the cross and do this in remembrance of him. And then we trust that the Holy Spirit, the same one that raised Jesus from the grave and dwells in us, will use those feeble efforts.

Because we're not qualified either. We can't do it. We've got five loaves and a couple of fish, and we're like, "Man, Jesus, there's a whole lot of problems in the world. Like I don't know what to do." But we take our meager effort and bring them to Jesus. We bless and break just like the model of Jesus. And then we trust the Holy Spirit to do what the Holy Spirit does.

Because we live in that gap, we live in that gap between the old creation dying off and the new creation bursting forth right in the midst of this one. We lean and hope into that. The Kingdom of God is a Eucharistic revolution. It is one built on blessing and breaking. And Jesus demonstrates here when he feeds the 5,000 that it is enough. And the task before us is to take up our cross, to deny the ways in which we would want to bring about the Kingdom of God. He says, "Lay those down, take them, crucify them on the cross." This is the way in which we operate in the world. It's difficult, and it's hard, and at times it's painful. But this is how you do it.

Think about Jesus' teaching on forgiveness. What is forgiveness? It's blessing the other who's wronged you. And then it's breaking a little for him. It hurts. It doesn't remove the pain. It doesn't remove the affliction. But, Church, what has Jesus done for us? He's blessed us. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And then he breaks for us. This is our example. This is our revolution. This is the way in which we go about carrying out the Kingdom of God.

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