Text: Mark 6:30-44

**Introduction**

There aren’t many of them, but the feeding of the 5000 is one event that is in all 4 canonical gospels. And in each of those gospel I think it has a unique theological overtone. It’s the same basic story in each, so they share a lot, but each evangelist has their unique insights. In Matthew it is simply the compassion of Jesus. His guts are churned at the crowds. In John it is the contrast between the crowd which desires to make Jesus King and the Kingdom that Jesus is proclaiming. Mark’s emphasis I think is about sustaining the spiritual life in the midst of this world.

**Text**

It’s the first line of the gospel lesson that connects with what immediately came before. “The Apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught.” After being rejected in his home town of Nazareth Jesus had immediately sent the disciples out to proclaim the kingdom. And they’ve been all over. As something of a buffer to cover that time the disciples are away we had last week’s lesson on the death of John the Baptist. But now they are back. And Jesus understands the rhythm and energy of what those disciples have done. He tells them “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest awhile.” The adrenaline rush of demons fleeing at your command. The amazement of healings they had been doing. The excitement of crowds. The days on the road. It’s not sustainable…not without some downtime. And Jesus recognizes a bit more. The crowds that he had been drawing? The disciples who had been doing the same works are now drawing. “For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.”

The Spiritual life can be like that. You get in those seasons of excitement when faith and the mystery of it all seem so close. And you keep going on the Spirit. Things are clicking. But when they are clicking you don’t have time for the basics. Usually it starts with your personal prayer life suffering a bit. That’s the easiest thing to neglect. After all the Spirit feels so close. Prayer seems unnecessary. And then maybe you miss the church gathering – what I doing is more important. And that busyness takes over. And you have no leisure to eat. That’s exactly when Jesus bids us “come away to a desert place.” Come away for some prayer and reflection.

And maybe we are fortunate and we can get in the boat and go to that place of prayer and contemplation. And please don’t miss it, the boat is almost always a symbol for the church. But sometimes, everything of life that has drained you recognizes where you are going and runs on foot and gets their ahead of you. And you can’t just drop it, at least not without being heart less. Jesus comes ashore as sees those crowds and has compassion. You might remember me saying before I really don’t like that translation. It is too bloodless. He had his guts churned. They were sheep without a shepherd. So Jesus does what he does – teaches and heals.

And it gets late, and the disciples who were already hungry and exhausted are even more so. And Jesus has drug them out to desert place. Notice how they talk to Jesus. “When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, ‘this is a desolate place, and the hour is late. Send them away…’” Is that not how it is when we are at the exhausted end of our spiritual rope? Jesus, this is your fault. We were already tired and you bring us out here. And now not only can’t we eat, there is nothing out here and all these people we were serving are a long walk themselves. What exactly where you thinking Jesus?

And that’s when you get the final straw. “You give them something to eat.”

What are you talking about Jesus? Give them something to eat? You want us to spend 200 days wages? We are starving ourselves. We don’t have enough ourselves. We’ve go weeks doing what you wanted. We’ve followed you our here into the desert. And you want us to feed them?

**Moral**

If you are trying to live the Spiritual life under your own power, this is always where it ends. Yelling at God in exhaustion, disbelief and maybe despair. We don’t have enough of anything within ourselves to fulfill what is being asked. And we’ve neglected the things that replenish. We can be travelling with Jesus all the way and somehow have missed him.

**Christology**

When we are there what does Jesus do? I think this is a beautiful description

First he makes us take out whatever we’ve got left. “How many loaves do you have?”

Second he places us back in community. “He commanded them to sit down in groups.”

Third, when God places in that community, even in a desolate place, “they sat down on green grass.”

And finally whatever we have, he blesses, multiplies, everyone is satisfied, and it is more than enough.

I want to think about what each one of those pictures a bit more. The disciples had 5 loaves and 2 fish. Not enough even for the 12 of them. Whatever we have ourselves isn’t enough in and of ourselves. And God can work direction from nothing. But God typically works from means. We are constantly afraid that we will not have enough. And this is even more the case when we are exhausted and in that desolate place. But God is neither of God of scarcity nor as another parable has it as God who reaps where he did not sow. He is the God of providence, and what he has provided – be it 5 loaves and 2 fish, or whatever we are staring at – will be enough. Not enough by our standards, but more than enough for the eyes of faith. When we here that “what do you have?” It is not the invitation to worry or exact accounting. It is the invitation to watch the providence of God. To take part in how God provides for all his people.

“He commanded them to sit down in groups – 50s and 100s. When God moves to provide for his people, to make sure they eat, it is usually not one at a time. We ask Americans being individualists are much more comfortable with our personal Jesus. But the typical means of the Spirit are the church. We believe in the Holy Spirit, who works through the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints. Christ has established His church and in the desolate place of this world it is here where you hear the word of God. And it is that Word – not however many loaves we have with us – that we live and are fed. And it is none of our jobs to do that. When we think it is, that is when we end up in that pitiful place yelling at God. Same thing happens in the Old Testament to Elijah. God puts us together because he knows we are like sheep without a shepherd, and he has come to be the good shepherd.

And like any good Shepherd, even in desolate place, he finds the green grass. In the midst of the desolate sinful world, His church is the green grass.

And Christ supplies exactly what we need. Abundantly. Most of all he supplies himself. And it is only in Christ that we are refreshed. It is only in His blessing that we find the strength and peace of the spiritual life. We might think that we are inconsequential. That God has more important things to do. But the providence of God always has more. “They all ate and were satisfied.”

**Eschatological**

To me Mark’s feeding feels like an object lesson in the providence of God. Ask and you will receive. God desires to give abundantly to his people.

That would be the simple things – like the stuff we need to support this body and life. God gives that to the just and the unjust alike. If you need it, ask.

But it is not limited to those temporal things. Eternity is often described as the wedding banquet, or a feast. “On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine,” Isaiah says. God desires that banquet to be full. The remnants out of all the countries who have been blessed and multiplied will be at a much different feast. No longer a green patch in the middle of a desolate place. No longer a place where you have to worry about the next meal or being dismayed. But that place where all fears are past. And justice and righteousness rule. Where the people of god will dwell securely.

This the ultimate providence of Christ. Yes, he can easily take our five loaves and two fish and feed 5000. But he has blessed us and asked his Father to forgive us. And none shall be lost. All the broken pieces shall be picked up.