

The Beginning of the Good News
A Study of the Gospel of Mark
The Episcopal Diocese of West Texas
Fall 2015

Is There Enough? Mark 6:30-52; 8:1-21

Some things to think about...

Hunger

In the places where Jesus served, he came into contact with many people who were quite literally hungry every day of their lives. The Roman economy was structured to benefit those in power, and many of the subsistence farmers in the villages Jesus walked through were gradually losing their land, as a result of intense taxation and the need to provide tribute to Rome. But hunger could also be a way of speaking about the people's hunger for the righteousness and justice of God. While they live in the "promised land," they suffer under foreign rule that is not in line with God's will for the people. In Mark 6 and 8, Jesus speaks to both kinds of hunger as he both feeds and shepherds the crowds. He confronts the alien power of Rome both practically and spiritually.

Yeast

In the Bible, yeast is sometimes a metaphor for something good, like the power of the kingdom (Luke 13:21), and at other times yeast is used to represent something evil. The latter is the case in Mark 8, when Jesus cautions the disciples not to be fooled by the yeast of the Pharisees and Herod. In this case, yeast represents the many, perhaps small, things that one might be inclined to overlook, but that add up to a tremendous evil. The Pharisees and Herod cooperate with Rome in thousands of ways, some of which may seem perfectly innocent, but the outcome is the poverty and misery of the majority of the Jewish people.

Discipleship

Notice that Mark 6:30 begins with the disciples' return from having been sent out on their own to carry out the ministry of Jesus. They have been working without a break for a long while, and Jesus promises them some time alone to rest. But that plan changes when the crowds beat them to their destination. The disciples' fatigue is a part of their inability to be gracious as the story unfolds. Both Mark 6 and 8 are very important for the ways in which they add to our sense of the struggle the disciples have in maintaining faith. The point is not that we make fun of the disciples as they grumble and bumble about, but rather to make clear the struggle of faith for all future disciples of Jesus. As the original disciples try and fail to understand the extraordinary generosity of God in the midst of a time of scarcity, they show us the consequences of our own lack of faith.

Attending to the Word...

Track the disciples' concerns in both stories. What are all the things they worry about?

Pay careful attention to each element in the feeding stories. Who does what in each story? What are the similarities? What are the differences? Note the gap between 6:41 and 6:42, and between 8:6-7 and 8:8. Each story carefully preserves the mystery of a very small amount of food becoming enough to fill the bellies of thousands of people. Do not rush to fill the gap, because this is the place where we encounter the unknowability of God. God is generous beyond our comprehension.

In Mark 6:50, Jesus says literally, "Take heart, *I am*; do not be afraid." "I am" is the name of God given to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:14). The boat was an early Christian image for the church. What are the disciples worrying about as they strain at the oars of the boat? How does Jesus reassure them?

Making the Word your own...

How do the things the disciples worry about relate in a general way to the things you tend to worry about? What are the things you have worried about in the last seven days?

Can you tell a story about a time when you were sure that there would not be enough of something, and yet God provided? Jesus grows frustrated with the disciples because they do not remember how God has cared for them in the past. Do you tend to remember or to forget God's past graciousness?

Think about right now, in your immediate context as well as our global context. What worries you most? What are you most afraid that there is not enough of? How do these stories from the Gospel of Mark respond to your fears?

If you felt that you truly had enough (money, food, material things), what would you do with the next thousand dollars that came your way? How does your answer reflect your deepest values (or not)? What would give you the most delight in being generous?