

No Turning Back--Living the surrendered life

Lesson 8

(Mark 8:1-21)

Mark 8:1-13

During those days another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance."

His disciples answered, "But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?"

"How many loaves do you have?" Jesus asked.

"Seven," they replied.

He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. When he had taken the seven loaves and given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people, and they did so. They had a few small fish as well; he gave thanks for them also and told the disciples to distribute them. The people ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. About four thousand men were present. And having sent them away, he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the region of Dalmanutha.

The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven. He sighed deeply and said, "Why does this generation ask for a miraculous sign? I tell you the truth, no sign will be given to it." Then he left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side.

Wait a minute... Didn't we just read this story in Chapter 6?

- Is Mark retelling the same story?
- Or is Mark on to something here about the Gospel?

Mark is careful to tell us that "another crowd" gathered so that we do not assume Mark just told us the story a minute ago.

Mark is careful to describe the story in such a way that it assures us of two different instances.

Mark makes his point clear about Jesus extending the kingdom to the Jews and the Gentiles

But Mark also provides further commentary on the disciples, which is where the deeper problem is.

Our reading this morning makes it pretty clear that the disciples still do not "understand."

Therefore, Jesus keeps asking the same question to his disciples in the boat as the reading continues in **8:14-21**.

The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat. "Be careful," Jesus warned them. "Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod."

They discussed this with one another and said, "It is because we have no bread."

Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and

ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?"

"Twelve," they replied.

"And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?"

They answered, "Seven."

He said to them, "Do you still not understand?"

Here's the disciples reality: They do not understand but they think they do.

They think they are getting this whole interpretation game down. Jesus mentions the yeast of the Pharisees at which point the disciples start patting each other on the backs saying, "I know what he's talking about... no bread." Jesus can see that they are totally clueless. First you have twelve baskets full of bread... then you have seven baskets of leftover bread... so what do you make of that, dear disciples? **"Nineteen baskets of bread?"**

No wonder Jesus at the end of this story says: "Do you still not understand?"

BTW- Translated literally from the Greek: "You don't get it, do you?" (Okay, maybe not "literally.")

You know, it's hard to read Mark and feel good about the disciples. I mean, what's up with these guys? How dense can these guys be after having witnessed Jesus feed the 5000 with just a handful of food, and then just a chapter-and-a-half later they still do not understand how he will be able to feed all these people?

But for the reader – that's you and me – we must understand.

Others came to Jesus, like the Pharisees, who seek a sign as a rescue from uncertainty. But that is not what Jesus is about, not then... and not now.

Certainty is not a priority for Jesus. If it were, he would have never chosen these twelve in a million years. He wouldn't have chosen us for that matter. So among all the questions to his disciples – and perhaps even to us – he asks us all in **8:17, "Are your hearts hardened?"**

He asks them this in order to help them get past their addiction to clarify every event (do you know what this addiction is like... I do!), which is why the first question in 8:17 is, "Why are you still talking about having no bread?"

But let's just say for the sake of fun that I'm standing there next to the disciples, and like Peter, I want to answer without thinking: "Why am I still talking about having no bread? Because we had no bread! And the people were hungry."

But Peter and I somehow miss the point. The first feeding was not about bread... and the second feeding is not about bread... and... everything for that matter in between the two stories is not about bread.

Whether talking about having to be clean on the inside before you are clean on the outside, or the stories that follow, everything comes together between the two feeding stories that make demands on us as the readers of Mark, confronting us with a meddling question: "Is your heart hardened?"

As Mark builds this story towards a series of climaxes, we as the readers are asked to understand, not the meaning of the nineteen baskets of leftover bread... but the one loaf in the boat (v. 14).

Our problem is we face the model of poor discipleship from the disciples themselves.

As the readers, we are invited to respond to these stories by simply being thankful for the one loaf in the boat. Our initial reaction to verse 21 is to look Jesus in the eye and confess, "No, we don't understand." **Perhaps this is where we really begin to understand.**

We understand that one loaf with just a little yeast can grow to untasty proportions. But if we get our bread from Jesus, we will always have enough. When we lean on our own understanding, **we will never get it.** Our own understanding will amount to little more than bread that spoils. This may be the meaning of the nineteen baskets of uneaten bread. The baskets are there to remind us that Jesus provides, and that he is always present. He is present as we break the bread. Each of us, as we take the bread, understands: When I am with Jesus, I do not need nineteen baskets of uneaten bread. I need one loaf.

I need the bread of life.

But this is not about bread.

God's Concern

God's concern has always been for the poor—poor in spirit, poor in hope, poor in food, poor in connection, and poor in love. God is not only concerned but present with the poor, for blessed are the poor. When we join the activity of God, we join those who go without. Our prayer is not only for the poor, but we pray as the poor—for we are all lacking in what we need. In this recognition we find the life of God.

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