

Learning to Trust

Mark: The Gospel of the Kingdom

Mark 6:30-44

June 4, 2017

Randy Lovelace

This morning we continue in the Gospel of Mark. When we were together last Pastor Mayfield was preaching from the text that precedes this on the beheading of John the Baptist. And here what you have, you have the picture of Herod, whose court is full of partying, people full of drink. And you have a leader who doesn't want to look bad before all of his guests. So much so, that as a leader he decides that the best course of action is to save face by ordering the beheading of John the Baptist, that head then being delivered to his court amongst all the festival. His understanding of glory and dignity was ultimately selfish. How could he protect his dignity? How could he protect his position? How could he save face?

What a contrast to what we read next. A very different King, a very different Lord. One whose dignity and glory was not about amassing more power or protection of self, but giving it away—giving it away in a miraculous way. But to do one thing: to demonstrate to his disciples and us that he is worthy of our trust. At its heart, we're now entering that part of the Gospel of Mark that teaches very densely, very thickly, very deeply, what does it mean to be disciple. What does it mean to follow Jesus. Because this is a lesson that means to teach us what it means to trust Jesus.

So look with me now at the Gospel of Mark, Chapter 6, verses 30-44. "Learning to Trust."

³⁰The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught.

³¹And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.

³²And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. ³³Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. ³⁴When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things. ³⁵And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. ³⁶Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." ³⁷But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." And they said to him, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii^[a] worth of bread and give it to them to eat?" ³⁸And he said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." And when they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." ³⁹Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. ⁴¹And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all. ⁴²And they all ate and were satisfied. ⁴³And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. ⁴⁴And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men. [ESV]

This is the word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.) Will you pray with me. Lord, teach us to trust you. That at the heart of the gospel is the proclamation and the confession that Jesus is Lord and worthy of our trust. Help us, oh Lord, and save us from our self-sufficiency. May the light and power of your word and the seeking power of your Spirit open our eyes and our hearts to see the ways in which we are still walking in self-sufficiency, that we might leave here this morning trusting more fully and being satisfied—more than we could ever imagine—that Jesus is worthy of our trust. In Jesus' name. Help the teacher. Amen.

Self-sufficiency is a curious thing. On the one hand, when someone is considered to be self-sufficient, you could say that they feel so full of themselves, so capable, that they don't see any reason to trust in others. And that is very valid and very true. But there is also another form of self-sufficiency. That other form is equally poisonous. It's that because you feel self-sufficient, you recognize your inability and refuse to take risks, because you can only trust in yourself for what you can do for yourself. And it leads you to not see the needs of others, or if you see the needs of others, you simply come to the conclusion: I can only meet my needs; let them take care of themselves.

Both forms of self-sufficiency might look different. On the one hand it looks like being welled up with pride and arrogance. But the other side can look like false humility. I can't, so take care of yourself. Both are short sighted. Both demonstrate a lack of trust, trust in others. But in this passage it demonstrates that self-sufficiency can lurk in many different ways in human hearts. All of them, however, lead us away from trusting in Christ, and turn us to ourselves.

I want you to see that in this passage. Because in some ways this is a public miracle, but not all of the people sitting there understood it as such. It tells us that there were five thousand men. Well, we know good and well that it wasn't just men sitting there. We know and can presume and infer because it would not have just been men around, coming from the towns. It would have been women and children. Some would interpret that this could very likely be upwards of eight, maybe ten thousand people. And so there's no way that everyone sitting there on this hillside would have been able to appreciate that what Jesus was saying to his disciples, interpersonally with them—they would have not been able to see that all they had were five loaves and two fish. No, this miracle is public in nature and clearly had an impact on Jesus's ministry, but at its heart it is a lesson in discipleship between Jesus and His disciples.

And so we're allowed this audience to see what Jesus is teaching. And he is teaching his disciples and us to learn how to trust him. So if you'll see in your bulletin, you'll see the three points. The **Dignity of Jesus** and how he deals with it; **Hard Hearts**; and **The Challenge to Self-sufficiency**.

Let's begin with the **Dignity of Jesus**. What is the dignity of Jesus in this passage? The dignity of Jesus, first and foremost, is to see that Jesus in his ministry is outwardly faced. On the one hand, he invites his disciples. . . We see, beginning in verse 30, that they didn't have enough time to eat, they were so busy doing ministry. But notice Jesus's concern was for them. We see that as he invites them. Listen, we need to go away and we need to find a place where we can eat. We'll go to a desolate place and we'll be with ourselves, and he would teach them. They would likely pray and eat together. But notice in verse 34, that plan to simply draw time away for themselves, to gain rest and renewal, is foiled, because his ministry has grown very public, very attractive, and people start flooding and chasing after them.

And so in this moment that Jesus is even being outwardly faced with His disciples and saying we need to find this place where we can be together and he can continue to minister to them, that is, verse 34 tells us that “When he went ashore he saw a great crowd...” Now his plan was to get time away with his disciples. Here he is faced with a great crowd. We see the outwardly faced dignity of Jesus. Unlike Herod trying to save face and draw power to himself, Jesus is about giving away.

And he sees them, and he says these words: “He had compassion on them, because they were [like] sheep without a shepherd.” This is why we had a reading from the prophets. This is why it brings to mind Psalm 23. Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, even there you are with me. You set a table before my enemies. Jesus is the great shepherd. We learn this in the Gospel of John as we hear that Jesus is a shepherd who cares for his sheep. And he looks out at this mass of people, and he can't help but give. This is one part of the dignity of Jesus. He doesn't amass it. He doesn't hoard it. He isn't trying to attract it. He's giving away.

But also notice this. He has a delegated dignity. Not only doesn't Jesus just look at this mass of people and have compassion on them, and say OK, here's how I'm going to fix it. Jesus didn't need his disciples, yet he chose to delegate his dignity, by looking at his disciples—after they've already come to him and said hey, listen, we don't have enough. They need to go away, back to their towns. And Jesus simply looks at them and says, “You give them something to eat.” He wasn't being ironic. He wasn't just saying it to be sarcastic He's looking at them and saying, “You give them something to eat.”

What is he doing? He means to say to them: I am with you. And because I am with you, I am sending you out. And if I'm sending you out, I will give you what you need. Give them something to eat. Jesus means to demonstrate his power—not on his own, but even through doing it through his disciples. We know this to be the case, because that's what he ends up doing, though against their initial reaction. We'll get to that in a moment. But Jesus's dignity is about turning outward to the needs of those who were dying, who were lost, who were sheep without a shepherd. But he also looks at his disciples and says, I will seek to draw them [to myself], but I will do it even through you, my disciples.

But also notice this. That Jesus. . . It would have been enough, would it not, to simply have enough. For the third part of the dignity of Jesus isn't just the outwardly face, it isn't just that he delegates his dignity and desires to do it through his disciples. His provision is overflowing. Notice again what it says. “And he divided the two fish among them all,” along with the loaves. Verse 42: “And they all ate and were satisfied.” Of course the other Gospels demonstrate that there was an overwhelming abundance. Just allow that to sink in for just a moment. It would have been enough to give everybody just enough, but that is not what Jesus does. His dignity demonstrates over and over again that his grace is never just enough. It is overflowing.

How beautiful is that that they would have baskets left over. Baskets. After 8000+ people. That is a dignity that is only befitting the glorious Son of God. This is what Jesus does. This is his beauty. This is principally an act that demonstrates to the disciples you can't yet see, even though I am telling you, what I'm going to do. That I'm going to give myself over and on the third day rise again. They will say to that, even after these things they will say to that: No, let it not be. That is important.

I've said this here before. Isn't it interesting. How many of us wish—if you were a follower of Jesus—how many of us wish that if Jesus was just in the house, we would get it. If he was in the place, if we had him walking beside us during all these things, then it would be like, oh, yeah, we have got this down. How amazing is that we still have in the Gospels that Jesus was around, he was in the place, he was doing amazing things. And yet even at the point that Jesus says, you think feeding 5000+ is crazy? Watch what I'm about to do on the cross. For I came to die for the sins of the world, and through me I will bring forgiveness and reconciliation. And I will die, and on the third day I will rise again. And they say, let it not be. They were arguing about who is going to be the greatest in the kingdom.

It demonstrates that the problem is never that if Jesus was just here. The problem is that in our human hearts there is a small place that controls a lot of our decision making, a lot of our emotions, a lot of our reactions. And it has a lot to do with trusting in ourselves. That Jesus, maybe, just doesn't know what he's doing, and I need to hedge my bets to cover for myself.

Jesus, ladies and gentlemen, is still feeding his sheep. He's seated at the right hand of God, the Father. And every time we hear the Word, every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper these nearly 2000 years, that is the Lord saying, I am the shepherd, and I will feed my people. So when we break bread and we take this is my body which is given for you; take this drink, this is my blood of the new covenant for the forgiveness of sins. Drink from it, all of you. It began with a supper. And he told his disciples continue to do this, and he blessed it. And every time we eat of this bread and drink of this cup, we proclaim Jesus is enough. But to say he is enough is to say his grace is overflowing. The dignity of Jesus.

But we come right back to the humanity, where many of us exist. Because even though this dignity is on display, we see the **Hard Hearts**. Notice what they see first. Verse 35. "And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, 'This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat,'" As if that was a good idea. Because this is a lot of people. Simply going back into the towns would not have suddenly satisfied their hunger needs. So what we understand by their hard hearts is that they only see what is missing. They only see what lacks. They look at the desert. They're with the Lord—the desert being a place, a desolate place, is how we are to translate that—and they only see what's missing. And yet the Lord is right there with them. We see that their hearts are hard.

We really see it is hard when we see the following. After Jesus says, "You give them something to eat," their response is, "And they said to him, 'Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat'" Their question back to him, though in English might sound polite, it is incredulous. Even after the Lord says to them, "Give them something to eat," not only do they see what is missing, they draw themselves into self-protection, versus having courage with the Lord to protect others from hunger.

You see, we begin to see that hard-heartedness really finds itself at its ground in trusting in self. Trusting in self isn't merely a display of pride: I can do this. It is also the opposite, as I said earlier. I can't do this. I won't do this. How dare you even ask me to do this? You take care of it. Let them provide for themselves. And they turn to the Lord, who has already demonstrated his power, and they say. . . Yeah, we've seen you bring someone back from the dead. No! We don't

have enough money. We can't imagine having enough money. Because two hundred denarii is more than a year's worth of income. And they're saying: Are you crazy? It's demonstrating that their hearts are hard from trusting that Jesus and his glory and his person is enough.

And here we find the turn, then, from hard-heartedness. Jesus simply doesn't leave them in their hard-heartedness. He could have just said, OK, fine I'll take care of it. It wasn't. . . You know, Jesus is about challenging them—because of his love for them—to challenge them in their self-sufficiency. And he looks at them, and in verse 38 he says, “How many loaves do you have? Go and see.” Now he's taking them down the path. He wants them to face what they say they see. Go and count what you have.

What he wants them to understand, first, is he's challenging them and the limits, first and foremost, the limits of their self-understanding. You see, the self-sufficiency only begins to see ourselves in what we can do, what we think we're capable of doing, which means we understand, perhaps, what we're capable of not doing. Either way, we don't like being told that. And yet Jesus wants to challenge that, to ask them: Go and count.

Now if you're wondering how this connects with our everyday lives. think of this for a minute. Now the writer Dr. Paul Tripp says this about this idea of **Self-sufficiency**. He says: “The lie of self-sufficiency is I have everything I need inside myself to be what I'm supposed to be and to do what I'm supposed to do. Although young children have almost no understanding of the world around them, they will resist help, because they want to hold on to the delusion that they do not need wisdom, instruction, or correction. Let me give you an example. Little Jimmy, your son, has discovered that his shoes have laces. He has realized that after he puts the shoes on, they need to be tied. So you walk into Jimmy's bedroom, and he has his shoes on the wrong feet and is fumbling with his laces. You know that he could fumble with those laces for a century and not make a bow. But when you have bent down to assist him, he slaps away your hand. He wants to believe that he is capable, that he doesn't need to be quiet, submit, and learn. These are among the many of the lies, but this, the first, that was told by the serpent in the Garden of Eden. You don't need God.”

Self-sufficiency enables us to only see what we believe to be our limits or our capabilities. And we want to limit others from helping us. But Jesus is not thwarted. He asks them to count, and then what does he do? He lifts up the bread, the five loaves, and the two fish. And by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the blessing that is given, the Lord turns it into a vast, moveable feast. Have everyone sit down in hundreds and fifties, and give them something to eat. Self-sufficiency, the Lord understands, limits our trust in the all-sufficient Lord. At its very bottom, this is the challenge to our human hearts. That Jesus, after he had done this, he divided it among them. “And they all ate and were satisfied.” And the text tells us that “those who ate the loaves were five thousand men.”

Now as you will see as we move along here, the disciples still aren't getting it. They see Jesus, as you will see, doing things with water that they could not have imagined. But as we walk through these next several chapters in paragraphs, you will see it comes back to this question. Do you trust Jesus? Do you trust the Lord? Ladies and gentlemen, we can have all of our doctrines nicely lined up and ordered, and yet not trust Jesus. Because guess what? Our orthodoxy about the order of our doctrines doesn't save us. Understanding who Jesus is and what he has done is of preeminent importance, but we can understand who he is and even

claim and say I understand what he has done, and yet not trust him. Why is that? It is because we want just enough of Jesus that we think we need, and the rest? We will hedge our bets.

As one writer says this. Take the beautiful doctrine of the atonement, for example, the scriptural insistence that our sins are forgiven by trusting Jesus, who died on the cross and rose from the dead. The usual view is that this trust inevitably involves accepting some intellectual formulation about how Jesus's death and resurrection could possibly have achieved such a happy issue to deal with our afflictions. The point is, however, not whether this understanding of the atonement is true—because it most certainly is—and it is adequate, surely enough. It is that none of it is strictly necessary for laying hold of the atonement of Jesus. You can have an understanding of what Jesus did upon the cross for our sins to reconcile us to God, but understanding it isn't trusting in the atonement. Because we see it right before our eyes. Watching Jesus take five loaves and two fish, blessing it through the power of the Spirit, and having it feed thousands doesn't mean that we can trust him.

And that is what is so devastatingly true about the passage and so devastatingly challenging. It means we find this place—and each of you knows where that place is, as I do in my own life—that there is a throne somewhere in our lives that we don't want to give up. I've got this, and I can't trust you with this. What is that throne for you? Is that throne your throne of your success or your children's success? Of your retirement or your hope for retirement? Is it your skill set? Is it your intellect? Is it your relationships? Because through all of it, from the birth to the resurrection of Jesus, and all of the miracles and teaching in between, comes down to one question. Not what do you think of it all. But do you trust him?

This is the challenge to our western, 21st century, all-sufficient and successful, well-ordered lives. Do we trust Jesus? Or do we think we got here because Jesus-plus-us. This is the question of discipleship. May the Lord compassionately, graciously—by the body and blood of Christ through the power of his Spirit—help this day be a day of renewal. Where on our knees, either literally or figuratively in our hearts, we can begin going through the areas of our lives, and saying, Lord, I haven't trusted you here. Have mercy upon me. Help me to trust. Help me to trust. Help us to trust you will work, for you are good, and your love endures forever.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we acknowledge to you that in the very part of our DNA as human beings is that we want to be stiff-necked, and to simply tell you over and over again, take care of these things, but not these things. That we want to be able to trust in ourselves. But Lord, we recognize, as with the disciples, it is so with us—that we can know a lot about you, and yet not trust you. We thank you for the Lord Jesus, who challenges us in our self-sufficiency. And Lord, indeed, as we count the figurative loaves and fish in our lives, we see and sense that there is not enough. So we ask you, oh Lord, in our lives, may your Spirit say to us over and over again: Trust Jesus. We thank you for your love. We thank you for your forgiveness that we have in Christ. We thank you for the abundant power and the residing power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus in us. Now help us as we rise from prayer, hearing from your word, to walk not in pride and self-sufficiency, but to walk in reliance and trust and humility. Help us, Lord Jesus. In your mighty and matchless name we pray. Amen.