

Rest in the Wilderness

Mark 6:30-44

Halifax: 6 October 2019

Introduction

Today we will continue our sermon series in Mark's Gospel.

- Our text today is Mark 6:30-44 where Jesus multiplies the bread and fish to feed five thousand men in the wilderness.
 - This miracle is very well known—it is recorded in all four of the gospels.
- But there is much more to it than a feeding miracle.
 - Matthew, Mark, and Luke do not spell it out for us the way John does, but they do let us know that there is something much more here than a feeding miracle.
 - Mark draws attention to this by twice mentioning to us that the disciples did not understand what this miracle was all about.
 - In Mark 6:52, he says of the disciples: **For they had not understood about the loaves, because their heart was hardened.**
 - And in Mark 8:17-21, Jesus Himself rebukes them for still not understanding about this miracle and the one like it—saying: **“Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart still hardened? Having eyes do you not see? And having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember?”**
 - And then He reminds them about how He multiplied the bread in feeding the 5000 and the 4000.
- In this miracle Jesus is revealing that He is the Messiah who provides for His people in the wilderness.
 - We can toil endlessly and never obtain what we truly need, but rest is only found in Jesus.
 - He is the bread of God that came down from heaven to give us eternal life and it is only by coming to Him that we can find rest for our souls.
- In Mark's gospel, he especially points to Jesus as the one who gives us rest in the wilderness by giving us Himself.

Give attention now as I read to you from Mark 6:30-44:

Mark 6:30-44: Then the apostles gathered to Jesus and told Him all things, both what they had done and what they had taught. ³¹ And He said to them, “Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.” For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat. ³² So they departed to a deserted place in the boat by themselves. ³³ But the multitudes saw them departing, and many knew Him and ran there on foot from all the cities. They arrived before them and came together to Him. ³⁴ And Jesus, when

He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things. ³⁵ When the day was now far spent, His disciples came to Him and said, “This is a deserted place, and already the hour is late. ³⁶ Send them away, that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy themselves bread; for they have nothing to eat.” ³⁷ But He answered and said to them, “You give them something to eat.” And they said to Him, “Shall we go

and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give them *something* to eat?" 38 But He said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." And when they found out they said, "Five, and two fish." 39 Then He commanded them to make them all sit down in groups on the green grass. 40 So they sat down in ranks, in hundreds and in fifties. 41 And when He had taken the five

loaves and the two fish, He looked up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, and gave *them* to His disciples to set before them; and the two fish He divided among *them* all. 42 So they all ate and were filled. 43 And they took up twelve baskets full of fragments and of the fish. 44 Now those who had eaten the loaves were about five thousand men.

May the LORD add His blessing to the reading and the preaching of His holy word.

- There is much for us to learn from this passage.

I. First, see here that Jesus knows your need for rest... and He cares.

A. Sometimes our spiritual batteries need to be recharged.

1. Such is the case with the disciples of Jesus.

a. We find them in verse 30 gathered to Jesus after their first mission.

- Jesus had sent them out in pairs to heal and to teach in the villages of Galilee.
- They are gathered to Jesus to tell Him about their experiences—it was a time for learning and encouragement and thanksgiving.

b. No doubt, they would be weary from this.

- It was their first mission and that makes it all the more tiring.
- They would have met with many things that would have stretched them and perplexed them because this was their first time to do this without Jesus by their side.
- Moreover, giving to others is draining. You take their needs as your own and seek to provide for them with all that you have.

c. Besides that, they had the stress of knowing that Herod had executed John the Baptist.

- Perhaps they were wondering if they would be the next to be arrested and imprisoned and possibly even executed as John was.

➤ All of this was at work to drain their spiritual batteries.

2. If you are involved in ministering to and serving others (and I hope you are) you know what this is like.

a. Perhaps there are those who are not walking with the Lord and you are trying to encourage them to get back on track.

- You are burdened for them—and you carry that.
- You spend time with them and try to help them.

b. Or maybe you have been helping with other needs.

- Someone who is sick, someone who is overworked.
- You parents can often become drained in caring for your children.

c. Your own burdens can add to the weight of it all.

- Perhaps you are sick—even chronically so.
- Or maybe there are financial problems or relational problems that are weighing you down and wearing you out.
- Maybe you are fighting against temptation or burdened with your sins—perhaps fear or lust or discouragement—or guilt from past sins.
- It might be the burdens of your daily employment.

TRANS> All these things can make you weary.

B. But note well that Jesus graciously calls you to come apart with Him and rest.

1. This is beautifully shown in our text.

- After hearing of some of their adventures, Jesus apparently senses that they are weary and in verse 31-32, you can see His gracious invitation:
 - Mark 6:31-32: **And He said to them, “Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.” For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat. 32 So they departed to a deserted place in the boat by themselves.**
- The description here is of constant interruptions... people were constantly coming and going—as soon as one party left, another came.
 - So Jesus calls them to go to a deserted place with Him—a wilderness area—and rest for a while.
 - You will recall that Jesus Himself often went away to pray.
 - Remember how the disciples came looking for Him, telling Him that everyone was seeking Him?
 - Yes, even Jesus Himself in our human flesh needed to get away for spiritual and physical rest and refreshment.
 - What care He shows to His disciples in calling them away like this.

2. Has He not also called you to come apart with Him and rest?

- Indeed He has!
 - a. From the very beginning, He appointed one day in seven for us to be a holy rest for us and our souls—the weekly Sabbath Day.
 - It is a day to be with our Lord so that we might be rejuvenated.
 - He has appointed that there be a holy convocation, an assembly with each other for worship—a gathering set apart to God.
 - We desperately need this weekly time to refresh our souls!
 - b. The scriptures also call us to take time each day to seek the Lord.
 - The Jews customarily prayed at the time of the morning and evening sacrifices that God had appointed for them under the Law.
 - Daniel, as a busy high government official, retreated for prayer three times a day.
 - If you are busy with work and many responsibilities, you need to be all the more careful, like Daniel was, to maintain these times of spiritual refreshment with the Lord.

- Proverbs 8:34 pronounces a blessing to all who come to Christ, the wisdom of God, saying: **Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors.**
- In Psalm 145:1-2, we promise to worship daily: **I will extol You, my God, O King; and I will bless Your name forever and ever. ² Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your name forever and ever.**
- c. We are also expected to have more extended times for spiritual refreshment.
 - Paul, in speaking about the importance of being available to our spouse for physical relations, shows that he rather expects that we would also have dedicated times of spiritual refreshment when he says:
 - **1 Cor 7:5: Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer...**
 - Do you ever set aside time for fasting and prayer?

TRANS> How considerate our Lord Jesus is of our needs.

- Be sure that you come apart with Him by prayer and the word when you become spent and weary. He will minister to your soul.

II. But sometimes everything seems to militate against obtaining this rest.

A. Sometimes, a great multitude chases after you.

1. That is what happened with Jesus and His disciples in a crazy literal way.
 - Verse 33 tells us what happened when Jesus and His disciples set out in their little boat for their getaway...
 - **Mark 6:33-34: But the multitudes saw them departing, and many knew Him and ran there on foot from all the cities. They arrived before them and came together to Him. ³⁴ And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude...**
 - This is crazy!
 - Jesus put out to sea, probably going about a six kilometers across the lake, and the crowds ran along the shore to head them off... going about a dozen kilometers on the land.
 - When Jesus and His disciples arrived, there they were on the shore—not just a few—but a great multitude.
2. How often does it happen to you... that you set out to spend time with the Lord, but a multitude seems to follow you?
 - Parents with little children know all about this.
 - Somebody needs a diaper change.
 - Somebody spilled something or broke something.
 - Somebody is in a quarrel.
 - The phone rings and it is a neighbour who needs your help.
 - You have an early meeting at work and you slept in because you worked late the night before—and it's going to be like that all week.
 - A person you are seeking to minister to just texted you to tell you that his wife walked out on him and he wants to talk to you.

- Maybe you are looking forward to the Lord's Day... you have come to see that you need to be more faithful about it...
 - But it's Sunday and you are sick...
 - or one of the car doors was left ajar and your battery is dead...
 - or you are ready to go to church, but you drop your casserole all over your clothes and on the floor before you even get out the door.

TRANS> Perhaps you will remember how Jesus, when His disciples came to Him and told Him that everyone was looking for Him said,

- **Mark 1:38: "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth."**
 - Perhaps Jesus would do this now... but no... this is not a multitude looking for healing—they have run miles to be with Him. This is a preaching opportunity.

B. Jesus shows us that He cares about this multitude that is seeking Him.

1. Verse 34 tells us that when He saw them on the shore, He was **moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things.**
 - This multitude did not have direction—they needed a leader—a shepherd to guide them to the green pastures and to protect them—to guide them.
 - Jesus begins to minister to them with the word of the kingdom.
 - He teaches them until the day is spent.
2. So it is with your children—with the people you minister to—even with work.
 - You know that the Lord Jesus not only cares for you, but also for all of these that He has put in your life...
 - And you know that when He brings them to you, He wants you to minister to them in His name.
 - His compassion, joined with the Father's compassion, is one of the reasons He came down from heaven and went to the cross for us.
3. He is not irritated with the multitude, rude as they were to pursue Him like this when He was trying to get away.
 - It is His way to be touched when He sees those who earnestly seek Him.

C. But the disciples conclude that it is time for some relief from this multitude and take matters into their own hands.

1. They come to advise Jesus what ought to be done with this multitude that has already taken up the whole day.
 - Look at verse 35-36: **When the day was now far spent, His disciples came to Him and said, "This is a deserted place, and already the hour is late. ³⁶ Send them away, that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy themselves bread; for they have nothing to eat."**
 - This is really quite reasonable and even considerate.
 - Because of the nature of this gathering—with them running along shore—they had not brought provisions with them.
 - With so many of them, they may have a hard time finding enough food to eat, so they had best get on their way.
 - The disciples of Jesus were probably getting pretty hungry too.
 - Jesus seems to have overlooked this in His zeal to teach this crowd.

2. It can be easy for us to take matters into our own hands.
 - One of the most common things we do is decide what the rest is that we need.
 - Jesus calls us to come apart with Him.
 - For us to do that, we engage in the means of grace.
 - He connects with us when we pray both publically and privately, read the word, hear the word preached, sing praises in public worship, remember the Lord's Day, meditate on His word, and such.
 - Many times, we think that our rest will come from medication or therapy of some kind... from a vacation of a certain kind... from people treating us a certain way... from going off to watch TV or something.
 - But what we need most is to get away with Jesus.
 - This is actually what Jesus *did* do with His disciples.
 - Yes, the multitude was around, but in this venue, He was able to preach the word much more than He ordinarily did, for the multitude that came to Him in this deserted place had run. There were not many sick among these except a few that lived nearby that had joined them.
3. And let me say something about this multitude.
 - They also have taken matters into their own hands.
 - They too obviously came to Jesus looking for what they thought they needed from Him.
 - Because of their strange behaviour in running to head Him off like they did, there are many who think that they were Zealots, a group that was organised in AD 6 by Judas the Galilean to overthrow the Romans.
 - Many of them lived in Galilee.
 - They would have been provoked by Herod's murder of John the Baptist and they want to organise a militia with Jesus as their leader.
 - They wanted to overthrow the Roman government, and Jesus was the one they needed to lead them.
 - We don't know for sure that they were zealots, but surely many of them were because there were many of them around in this area.
 - And we *do* know what John tells us in his gospel... that this crowd wanted to take Jesus by force and make Him king.
 - All the gospels say that they were 5000 males—the word that refers to men and not women is used... and they were obviously not old or feeble as many of them ran over ten kilometers.
 - Matthew says 5000 men besides women and children, suggesting that there were only a few women and children, but those were probably the women and children that lived in the region.
 - But the point is, these men, whether they were zealots or not, wanted to find rest by getting Jesus to be their king—according to their ideas of what kind of king He should be.
 - And while they looked to Jesus, they looked to Him to give them what *they* thought they needed to find true rest and wholeness—not what He came to provide. “If we have political freedom, all will be well!”

TRANS> So you see that everybody has an agenda for what they think they need.

- Jesus, however, does not give us what we think we need.
- He is the bread of God who comes down from heaven to give us eternal life.
 - That is what we really need and that is why He always wanted to preach.
 - Unless we receive Him—eat His flesh and drink His blood as the one who was sacrificed to give us life—we will not inherit eternal life.
 - No, Jesus will not be controlled by our demands or thoughts of what we think He ought to do for us.
 - Rest comes when we come to Him as He is offered in the gospel, not when we come to have Him do what we want.

D. Jesus, instead of relieving us of our burden, sometimes increases it!

1. Did He forget about His promise to give His disciples rest in the wilderness?

- They have appealed to Him to send the multitude on their way so they can get something to eat.
- But instead, Jesus says something that Matthew, Mark, and Luke all repeat verbatim in their gospel accounts—because it was so shocking...
 - He says, verse 37, **“You give them something to eat.”**
- Jesus has made things worse—much worse—impossible for them!
 - **You give them something to eat?**
 - Look at their response in the rest of verse 37: **And they said to Him, “Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give them something to eat?”**
 - A denarius was a day’s wage, so about \$100 for us.
 - So 200 denarii would be \$20,000 or about \$4.00 per man.
 - Where were they to get \$20,000... and even if they did...
 - What village would even have that much bread?
 - Jesus has given his burdened disciples way more than they can bear!

2. Have you ever had this experience with Jesus?

- You are weary and burdened. You know He cares for you.
 - You ask Him for relief, but instead of relieving you, He actually increases your burden even more—a lot more.
 - Israel was delighted at first when Moses came, declaring that the LORD was going to deliver them from Egypt and they begin to pray...
 - But the answer they get is that Pharaoh demands that they make just as many bricks, but now they have to provide the straw as well.
 - And then when they finally do get out—
 - First, they have Pharaoh come after them—until God opens the Red Sea for them...
 - And then they find themselves out in the wilderness, over a million people, but with no food—at least they had food when they were slaves in Egypt... has God brought them out to die?

TRANS> But the LORD does all of this deliberately.

- What Jesus does here is deliberately reflective of Israel in the wilderness with Moses.

III. Jesus presents Himself as our provision in the wilderness. He teaches us that we find rest only in Him.

A. We have already read this story, so you know what Jesus does.

1. He has His disciples take inventory.
 - **38 But He said to them, “How many loaves do you have? Go and see.” And when they found out they said, “Five, and two fish.”**
 - He makes sure that we are very clear, very certain, that we do not have what it takes.
 - We are in the wilderness all we have is five pieces of flatbread and two fish to feed 5000 men.
2. v. 39-40: **Then He commanded them to make them all sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰ So they sat down in ranks, in hundreds and in fifties.**
 - The disciples, at Jesus’ command, have the multitude sit down in companies as if they were at a great banquet where they were going to be served.
 - The Jews were accustomed to doing this at their feasts—but where was the food?
 - This was also reflective of the way that Moses arranged the people in the wilderness.
 - There would have been great chaos in trying to serve everyone without this orderly arrangement.
 - And no one would have been able to see what happened.
3. Then Jesus provides for them—abundantly!
 - He takes all that the disciples have and He blesses it...
 - **41 And when He had taken the five loaves and the two fish, He looked up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to His disciples to set before them; and the two fish He divided among them all.**
 - The typical blessing that the Jews used was one that acknowledged that God was the source of their bread: “Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the world, who brings forth bread from the earth.”
 - And then somehow, none of the gospels tell us how—there is more and more bread and more and more fish.
 - The marvellous results are given in verse 42-44:
 - **So they all ate and were filled. ⁴³ And they took up twelve baskets full of fragments and of the fish. ⁴⁴ Now those who had eaten the loaves were about five thousand men.**
 - This was no scanty provision, as the 200 denarii would have been; they all had as much as the wanted... *all* is emphasised... all 5000 men.

B. Do you see what Jesus has done?

1. He has given rest in the wilderness by setting a table in the wilderness.
 - It is not going to the wilderness that gives you rest—just the opposite—but it is going to wilderness with Jesus!
 - We must learn to rest in Him as our all-sufficient provision.
2. This is the very gospel.

- When we understand that we have sinned against God...our holy God...
 - When we understand what is required of us...eternal punishment and perfect righteousness...
 - When we take inventory and understand the resources we have in our possession in the wilderness of this world...
 - our five loaves and two fishes when we need enough for 5000...
 - How glad we are to find that Jesus, the Son of God, is the bread from heaven who gives us eternal life... all that we need for everlasting life.... abundant life.
 - You could toil and toil, but try as you might, you can never find rest, never find relief, until you come to Him as your Saviour.
3. This is also your provision for ministry—in the home, in the community, in the church...
- Jesus showed His disciples that although they do not have what it takes to minister to others, they have Him.
 - As Paul said, “Who is sufficient for these things?”
 - We cannot save a soul.
 - We cannot provide for a soul.
 - We cannot transform a sinful heart or make atonement for sin.
 - But Jesus the Son of God has more than enough for all.
 - It is Him that we proclaim.
 - It is Christ and Him crucified in whom we boast.
 - He is the Saviour of the world.
 - When we are weary and overwhelmed in our service, what we need is Him.
 - We find Him most when we are the most helpless and burdened.
 - It is not relief from our burdens that we need so much as Him.

Conclusion

At first, the disciples thought that Jesus had failed in giving them rest,

- but then they received from Him rest that exceeded all their expectations!
- He brings us to wilderness to experience Messianic grace.
 - He fills us up with Himself, the bread of life, when we are empty—and then we live forever.
 - He is what you need.
 - Not as the disciples thought—to give them relief from the multitude...
 - Not as the Zealots thought—to give them political independence from Rome...
 - Not as you may think—to give you relief from your burdens...
- But you need Him as your bread to give you all you need in the wilderness.