Mark Lesson 20 (2022)

**FEEDING A LARGE CROWD THROUGH SMALL RESOURCES**

*(“How many loaves do you have? Go and see!”)*

Mark 6:30-44

Key Verse: 6:38

“‘Have many loaves do you have?’ he asked. ‘Go and see.’ When they found out, they said, ‘Five – and two fish.’”

Today’s event, Jesus’ feeding of the five thousand, is recorded in all four Gospels. (Mt 14:13-21; Lk 9:10-17; Jn 6:5-13) We wonder why. It may be because this event portrays Jesus’ messianic character excellently. Jesus’ feeding of the five thousand with five loaves and two fish was a unique miracle. Unlike other miracles, like healing the sick and driving out demons, which were done to individuals, this miracle was done to the public. In today’s event, we also see that Jesus trained his disciples to care for the needs of God’s people because he knew that his life in this world would not last long. It seems that his disciples were not ready for such a huge responsibility. But when we see how Jesus met the tremendous needs of people through the small resources they had, we can see God’s wisdom and the power of faith.

Look at verses 30-31. “The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, ‘Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.’” Jesus’ disciples had been sent out to the villages and towns in Galilee to preach, drive out demons and heal the sick people (6:7-13). It was their first mission journey without Jesus’ physical presence with them. Yet, their mission trip was successful and got much attention from people in Galilee, even King Herod, the tetrarch of Galilee (6:14-16). Now they got back to Jesus and gave him their mission report. I am sure they were tired after their mission journey even though it had been successful. They needed some time to rest and restore their energy. Yet, since so many people were coming and going, they were distracted and didn’t have time to care for themselves or eat. Knowing their tiredness and human limitation, Jesus told them to drop everything and go with him alone to a quiet place and get some rest. In other words, he helped them pay attention to caring for their own needs, which is self-care. How desperately we all need self-care.

Self-care is not being selfish, self-indulgent, or a luxury. If we neglect our needs for rest and restoration, we become exhausted and have burnout, depression, anger, or even physical illness. It’s not easy to slow down and find rest. So, Jesus told his disciples to come with him alone to a quiet place and get some rest. It was not the first time Jesus took them by themselves to rest (4:35). By the way, Jesus is the source of our rest and restoration.

Sometimes, we are also overwhelmed and become restless. We don’t know what to do. Some of us show burnout signs [pic#2 &3]. What shall we do? Well, it’s time to come to Jesus just as we are, casting all our cares upon him and laying all our burdens down at his feet to find rest and restoration. Self-care is different from being selfish. It also requires self-discipline. Jesus also said to his disciples in Matthew 11:28-30, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest in your souls.”

Look at verses 32-33. “So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.” Jesus and his disciples couldn’t hide. It seems that people could monitor Jesus’ movement even though they didn’t have GPS devices. (Global Positioning System) [Pic#1] And they were so fast enough to arrive at the place earlier than Jesus. Wow! When the disciples saw them, their hearts must have sunk, and they said, “*Oh, oh. Not again!”* They felt burdened because they knew people had high expectations and needs, which they didn’t think they could ever satisfy.

But how did Jesus respond to the crowd with high expectations and needs? Look at verse 33. “When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.” The description of Jesus in this verse is simple. But it portrays Jesus as a good shepherd for people and what kind of messiah he is on several points: ***1) His compassion for people, 2) his understanding of their helpless human condition, and 3) his solution for their needs.***

***First, Jesus has compassion for us.*** The Jewish religious leaders in Jesus’ time, including the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, were legalistic. They were critical or even judgmental when they saw people with many problems. They were judgmental because they were deeply embedded in their religious traditions based on “dos” and “don’ts” or what is right and wrong. As a result, they failed to see people in love and compassion, which is the core of God’s commandment. Even though we don’t like the legalistic Pharisees, most of us are trained to think like the Pharisees as if we should deserve God’s compassion through our good behaviors. It’s hard to get out of that kind of rigid mentality.

Jesus, however, was different from them. He saw people through the eyes of compassion, like a loving mother who sees her sick child with deep sympathy and cares. Jesus cared for people, not because they always behaved the way God wanted. He had compassion for them despite their condition. Jesus’ compassion for us is not conditional, but it’s unconditional. Compassion is his character. He didn’t come to this world to condemn sinners but to save them from their ignorance.

Due to their sufferings and difficulties, many people in Israel failed to see God’s compassion. However, God is the God of mercy. The Prophet Isaiah in the Old Testament portrays the God of compassion by saying in Isaiah 1:18, “Come now, let us settle the matter,’ says the Lord. ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.” Then he also said in Isaiah 55:1, “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.” Indeed, Jesus’ compassion for people shows that he is the Messiah.

***Second, Jesus understands the condition of fallen humankind.*** Jesus had compassion for the people of Israel in his time because they were like sheep without a shepherd. When Mark described it, he might have implied that the people of Israel had no spiritual leader who could guide them to God and his truthful way. Especially, after the death of John the Baptist, who spoke the truth without fear, people were disappointed and lost their spiritual direction. People didn’t know whom to trust and what to do personally and collectively. They lived in fear and confusion under hypocritical leaders. We all need a shepherd who can lead, protect, and guide us to the path of life no matter what happens in the world.

David was one of the most excellent leaders in Israel’s history. He was considered a shepherd of Israel. However, he also confessed that he needed a shepherd by saying in Psalm 23:1-3, “The Lord is my shepherd, and I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in the green pasture; he leads me beside quiet waters, and he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.”

When Mark said that Jesus had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, he indicated that Jesus is the shepherd for the people of Israel and beyond. According to John’s account, Jesus identified himself as the good shepherd. “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father- I lay down my life for the sheep.” (Jn. 10:14-15)

***Third, Jesus taught them many things.*** Jesus knew that people were lost and confused mainly because they were ignorant. So, he taught them many things. We are not sure what he taught them. I believe that he taught them the good news of God’s kingdom through the grace of forgiveness of sins, parables of God’s kingdom, basic principles of life, like the Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes, etc. By teaching many things, Jesus fed their thirsty souls. As people heard Jesus’ words, their fear was gone. Their disappointment was replaced with hope and hatred by love. It was a heavenly feast.

In verses 35-44, we see how Jesus trained his disciples to learn his compassion for the people and care for their needs. It was efficient training for them. The training started when the disciples brought the problem to Jesus. What problem did they bring? Look at verses 35-36. “By this time, it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him, ‘This is a remote place,’ they said, ‘and it’s already very late. Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.’” We notice that the disciples were concerned about people’s physical needs in the remote place. That’s remarkable progress. By the way, it was also because they might have been getting hungry. So, they suggested Jesus dismiss the people as soon as possible so that they could take care of themselves. But was it a realistic solution, considering the time and location? Of course not! Where could these people buy bread? There were 5,000 men, besides women and children, in a remote place. If you were in their shoes, what would you suggest? It’s far beyond our ability.

I am sure Jesus understood why his disciples had to suggest sending people away. However, he didn’t like it at all. What was his solution? John's gospel mentions that he wanted to feed these people miraculously (Jn. 6:6). Jesus didn’t want to dismiss these people in the remote place and starve to death. He wanted to feed them. Yet, his disciples could have never imagined that Jesus wanted to feed these people miraculously, like God, who gave manna from heaven to provide for the people of Israel in the wilderness (Ex. 16:36). But instead of telling them*, “Don’t worry, guys. I am going to feed them,”* he said to his disciples, **“You give them something to eat!”** (37a)

Why would he say that his disciples should give them something to eat, knowing they couldn’t do so? I used to think that Jesus wanted to teach his disciples a sense of responsibility. Yes, that’s possible. But I now believe that it was more than just a sense of responsibility that Jesus wanted to teach. He knew that they already began to feel responsible for the people. That’s why they suggested sending them away before it was too late. Jesus knew that. Yet, he wanted his disciples to learn how to overcome seemingly impossible circumstances by faith. He wanted to understand the power of faith.

But his disciples didn’t get it. So, when Jesus asked them that they should give them something to eat, they felt offended. Look at verse 37b. “They said to him, ‘That would take more than half a year’s wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?’” Half a year’s wages may be a lot for them, around $ 25,000 – 50,000 today; even $ 5,000 means too much for them. The more they tried to be reasonable and calculate, the more they thought Jesus made no sense.

What did Jesus suggest? When the people of Israel wandered in the wilderness, they became starving and complained to Moses, *“Hey, Moses. We used to sit around pots of meat and eat all the food we wanted in Egypt, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death. What are you doing?”* God heard their complaining and told Moses that he would rain down bread from heaven. When people got up in the morning, they found manna from heaven (Ex. 16). Wow! [pic#4]

But Jesus didn’t ask God to send manna from heaven. Instead, he asked his disciples to look for resources among the people. Look at verse 38. “‘How many loaves do you have?’ he asked. ‘Go and see.’ When they found out, they said, ‘Five – and two fish.” Probably, the disciples could have never imagined that they could find enough resources to feed such a large crowd of people. But they followed Jesus’ instructions anyway. We don’t know how long it took for them to find resources. They found something but minimal resources of five loaves of bread and two small fish [Pic#5]. I am sure the disciples were discouraged by finding just a tiny amount of food.

What did Jesus do with a small resource? Look at verses 39-44. “Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.” Jesus took what was brought to him and gave thanks. A miracle happened when the small resources of bread and fish were held in the hands of Jesus. They kept multiplying in the hand of Jesus until five thousand men ate and were fully satisfied. The disciples participated in the miracle by distributing food diligently.

The disciples learned that all they had to do was find small resources within the community and bring them to Jesus, and Jesus will bless it and feed the people in need.

So what’s the lesson we learn from this event? Jesus’ compassion for people created a miracle through small resources brought to him. The disciples understood the power of faith by finding resources and bringing them to Jesus by faith. In Jesus’ time, most people in Israel suffered from poverty. Eating three meals a day was a struggle for most people. The same is true for people in many parts of the world today. Besides, people need more than food. Many people are hungry emotionally; some people feel lonely and need meaningful companionship. Many people cry because they feel forgotten by others. Even though they eat three meals daily, they are not satisfied because they need affection and attention. There is also spiritual hunger, a hunger for the meaning and purpose of life, which only God can satisfy.

Most of us are not pastors or priests but ordinary Christian disciples. Yet, we are surrounded by many people in need, including our children, family members, friends, coworkers, neighbors of young and old, campus students in High school and college, etc. We often feel that we lack the resources to meet all their needs. Even though we want to be compassionate unless we have faith in Jesus, we are tempted to say, like the disciples, “Send them away!”

But we must remember that Jesus wants to feed the needs of his people. He also does not expect vast resources from us. He wants us to find whatever is available among us and bring it to him, and he will bless it to feed the needs of his people in our time. I believe that each of us here has small resources to bring to Jesus if we look for them. When we offer our small resources to Jesus, it can make a difference in somebody’s life. So, let’s not be discouraged when our resources seem too small. We can care for our sick family members and friends and give our listening ears to people who are lonely and crying for understanding. Most of all, we can share God’s words with one person. We can be supportive of people emotionally and spiritually. Nothing is too small and insignificant. A miracle can happen. As a faith community, I also believe we have many resources to serve God’s kingdom work and make a difference in the lives of many people who are in need. Many of you are already bringing your small resources to Jesus, your time, money, talent, energy, and other ways. You are making a difference, even in a small way. Please, continue to do so. Let us continue to find our resources and bring them to Jesus by faith. “How many loaves do you have? Go and see!”