



The Westminster Pulpit

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“Know What You Need” **Sermon on Mark 6:30-34, 53-56**

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Beautiful. The 23rd Psalm, it's a statement of faith. A good word to know by heart. If you hear nothing else, today, hear this: you need to know the 23rd Psalm by heart.

¹ The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
² He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;
³ he restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths
for his name's sake.
⁴ Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—
they comfort me.
⁵ You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
my whole life long.

In troublesome days, we need a good word.

Well, we find both in the sixth chapter of Mark's Gospel. We find troublesome days. Mark shares the gruesome story of King Herod's birthday party, where John the Baptist loses his head, and it is served on a platter. Sick! News is made of these things and advertisers like it. It will occupy the airwaves for weeks on end. But Mark does not dwell on it. He shuts off the 24-hour news coverage to show us what we need. In troublesome days, we need a good word. A good shepherd. Listen.

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, 'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while. For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves.

Let me just stop here for a moment!

There's nothing like a vacation! I took one the last couple of weeks. Went up to the pacific Northwest, and we missed the heat wave and had coolness and beautiful weather. Thank you very much. It's so good to get away... from you! I'm joking. But it does a body good to get away. Jesus knows that. "Come away to a deserted place by yourselves and rest awhile." He knows what we need.

Maybe. The disciples, you see, have gone out under the command of Jesus to preach repentance and heal people. And Mark says, "They were successful! They preached repentance, cast out many demons and cured the sick!" Success! If that happened to me, I don't think I'd take a vacation. I mean, why stop now? We'd get this place filled back up again! In July! But Jesus knows the temptation of a crowd. He always withdraws when he gets a crowd, often to be alone, to pray.

I don't know, maybe the disciples needed the break. They had no leisure, not even to eat. But, when the plane lands in Seattle, Jesus turns on his cell phone, and up comes 44 emails and ten texts, and right outside of security, everyone he was trying to get away from is right there. "Where can I flee from your presence? People!" I'm sorry. That's not how the story goes.

Mark writes:

"Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.

What do you suppose he taught them? Mark doesn't say, but can you guess? Can we make a faithful guess? And then can we be about claiming, "The Lord is my shepherd" and eliminating all the stuff from our mouths that doesn't match up with the

teachings of Jesus. Jesus taught and taught and taught, because Mark says, "It grew late."

And even though it's not printed in your bulletin, you remember what happens. The disciples go back to their old ways. Gone is this power to preach, power over the demons, power to heal, and they get all caught up with fear.

They see the thousands of people who are out in the deserted place, and they get scared. They can see the crowd grow by the hour. They can hear the growls of their own tummies. Thousands of hungry people will turn into a mob. "This isn't going to go well. Jesus says, "Give them something to eat!" And the disciples say, "Yea right! What are we going to do, rob a bank? Drive 12 food trucks? You want us to fish all night? Where are the nets?" The church can talk for hours about what's not possible.

And do you remember how Jesus responds? "How many loaves have you?" Do you ever answer that question on the survey-"What's your annual salary?" It's none of your business! Imagine if, at the beginning of stewardship season, the church came to you and said, "How much money do you have?" I'd be at home, looking out the window, and say, "Honey, there's a big moving van that just pulled up to the house." You have to give the disciples some credit. They answer with five loaves and two fish. You think that's true? Can you imagine giving it all to Jesus? When you're hungry?

He responds like a good shepherd. There beside the still waters. Jesus has everyone sit down, as Mark says, on the green grass, "He maketh me lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restores my soul."

Jesus takes the loaves and looks up into heaven. It's how you restore your soul. It's to know you're not the one in charge. It's knowing that life comes from above.

Jesus takes scarcity, and instead of holding it tightly against his chest, he holds it in his hands and looks up into the heavens as if God might have something to say.

When do we ever do that?

We do it at baptism. Chances are that your parents carried you in for your baptism and looked up into heaven. And the congregation looked up into heaven and said, "Here Lord, bless this one."

Maybe you were of age when you said it for yourself. When you looked at your life and said, "Life is more than me." And you looked up into heaven and said, "Ask my life and let it be... Consecrated, Lord to Thee".

Into your hands, Lord. May my life do great things in your name.

You make a statement of faith.

The Lord is my shepherd; not Fox news, not CNN, not social media, not a political party!

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They collected 12 basketfuls of loaves. That's one basketful for every disciple. From scarcity to abundance. You know who didn't get a basketful? Jesus. Wouldn't it be something if maybe, we gave from our abundance, to Jesus.

When they had crossed over, they came to land at Jen-sir-ay and moored the boat. When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the market-places, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

Because they knew he was. The Son of God. The Lord is my shepherd.

And this is The Word of the Lord.

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