

The Good Shepherd

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[0 : 00] Our sermon text today that we'll be considering is in Mark chapter 6 verses 30 through 44. That's page 790 in the Pew Bible. Let me encourage you to turn there in the Pew Bible. We'll have it on the screens, but it'll be good to have it open in front of you as we look through it together.

Mark chapter 6 verses 30 through 44, page 790. Well, as we come to God's Word, let me pray, and then I'll read for us. Our Father in heaven, you have indeed loved us through our Lord Jesus Christ, through your Son, and we look to you now to love us still, Lord, to demonstrate to us again how much you care for us in your great power and wisdom and steadfast love. As we come to your Word, open our hearts to hear and to receive what your Spirit is saying to us today, that we might live as people who truly know you.

We ask this in Christ's name. Amen. All right, let me read for us. Mark chapter 6 verse 30. The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all they had done and taught. And 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. And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. Now, many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When 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. 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. But he answered them, you give them something to eat. And they said to him, shall we go and buy 200 denarii worth of bread to give it to them to eat? And he said to them, how many loaves do you have?

[2 : 25] Go and see. And when they had found out, they said, five and two fish. Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups by hundreds and by fifties, and 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. And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up 12 baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. And those who ate the loaves were 5,000 men. Like sheep without a shepherd. Imagine sitting with Jesus that day and looking out across a crowd of thousands and sensing with Jesus their deep need. There they are, gathering eagerly, but without direction, without purpose. Struggling to survive, struggling to make sense of their lives, struggling to see how their lives fit into any larger story. Struggling under the rule of bad leaders, like the Herod that we heard about last week. Like sheep without a shepherd.

It's perhaps not too hard to imagine, isn't it? And can't you and I resonate deeply with that description at times? Don't we look out at our world, at the world we live in, and don't we look into our own hearts even and see much the same? People struggling to find purpose, direction, just eking out our lives, but with no discernible end or goal or bigger story in mind. And looking in all sorts of directions to find it, right? The latest social media fad, the latest dieting or relationship guru, the latest spiritual self-help book. Blown and tossed by a cultural moment that says, you are the king of your own destiny. You make the reality. You want to live. And yet we try, and we end up just as lost and lonely as before, like sheep without a shepherd.

But what this passage tells us is that this is not how humans were meant to live. Mark is showing us here that there is a shepherd who can receive us, satisfy us, and lead us.

[5 : 14] When we're weary, when our lives feel blown and tossed, when we're hungry and without direction, without security, without purpose, when earthly leaders have let us down, when earthly authorities have harmed us rather than protected us, Mark is showing us that Jesus is the true shepherd we need.

So let's consider what we see in this passage about Jesus, our true shepherd. The first thing we see is that Jesus has the compassion to receive us. He has the compassion to receive us. This is what we see so clearly in verse 34, isn't it? The great crowds gather on the shore, and Jesus' response is to have compassion on them. But consider how easy, how natural it would have been, for Jesus to just send them away instead. After all, Jesus here is trying to, he's trying to get away with his disciples. He's trying to, to get some time away. They had just come back from their first mission. They're telling Jesus everything they had done and taught, and Jesus says, let's go away to a desolate place. That is, let's get away from the crowds and away from the demands of ministry, and let's rest for a while. Notice that we're getting a glimpse of Jesus's compassion even in this moment of the story. He knows the disciples need rest. Sure, their, their, their adrenaline is probably pumping. They're probably ready to go, go out and do it again as they return from this first ministry trip. But Jesus knows their frame. He knows our frame, and he knows our limits. And he says, let's go and rest for a while. You and I can't keep going and going and going. There must be seasons of rest. So here is Jesus teaching his disciples this critical principle about Sabbath and rhythms of work and rest. And they, and they take the boats up the shoreline a little ways to a spot away from the towns and cities, a quiet, desolate place, a nice spot for a spiritual retreat. You know, they find

Killam's Point out in Brantford, and they pull off, and there they are. But the crowds see where they're headed, and they hurry up the coast too. And when Jesus and the disciples land back on shore, there they are, waiting for him.

Just think how easily Jesus could have sent them away, or told them to come back in a day or two, right, after he and his disciples had had their time to rest. Maybe you can even sense the disciples' sort of frustration in that moment. Come on, this was our chance. But rather than sending them away, Jesus receives them. In compassion, he welcomes them and begins teaching them. He has time for them. They aren't disrupting his agenda.

They aren't thwarting his plans. In fact, this is why he's come, to be the true shepherd that we need. The reality is this, friends. Jesus never turns away the one who earnestly seeks him.

[8 : 25] I don't know what obstacles you had to overcome to be here this morning. Some, perhaps, were minor. You know, you had another late night caring for a sick child, or, you know, another late night finishing a work project that had to be completed, and it was kind of rough waking up this morning, but you made it. Some, some obstacles that you had to overcome, perhaps, were even bigger than that, though. Perhaps they were bigger. Maybe you haven't been to church in a long time, and your last experience of church was so painful, you're not sure why you've come.

Or maybe you carry a heavy burden of guilt, and you're not sure you'll ever belong in a place like this. But look at what we see of Jesus here. He never turns away the one who earnestly seeks him. His heart is full of compassion towards you. You know, he didn't, he didn't step out of the boat and start assessing the crowd for their worthiness. Okay, is this crowd worth me interrupting this spiritual retreat for? No. He wasn't sort of asking himself, do they deserve my time today? No. He saw that they were like sheep without a shepherd, and that they had gone out of their way, maybe like you this morning, to be near him, and his heart filled with compassion and receive them. Now, maybe this morning you feel a little more like the disciples, wishing you could get away and rest for a day, or even an afternoon. You'd take anything you could get, right, in the midst of your busy and hectic schedule. If that's you, take heart, friend. Jesus sees your need. He's not asking you to work yourself into the ground to meet everyone's needs and to be their Savior. After all, he's the Savior, not you. It's okay for you to stop every once in a while, to let God be God, and to remember that you and I are just creatures. I like the opening verse of our passage, verse 30, the apostles returned to Jesus and told him all they had done and taught. I wonder if you and I might make this our practice more and more. After a long day or a long week, to find a moment to come to Jesus in prayer and to lay before him all our labors. Tell him everything we did, everything we said, everything we went through that day, and to entrust it to him. The same Jesus who received the crowds with compassion received the disciples with compassion too, as they told him everything they had done and taught, as they just unburdened their hearts and their souls to their Lord.

[11 : 05] Here, perhaps, is one key to experiencing his rest, to experiencing his compassion, to come to him simply, regularly, and to speak with him, to commune with him about the simple labors of your day, and to hand it over to him as your good shepherd, the shepherd who has the compassion to receive us. But, you know, it's not just compassion that Mark wants us to see.

The second point of our passage is that Jesus is the true shepherd who has the power to satisfy us. He has the power to satisfy us. As this day by the lake kind of goes on and begins to get late, the disciples urge Jesus to send the crowds away. We're here in this desolate place, they say. What are we going to feed them? If you send them away now, Jesus, maybe they can make it to the nearest village or villages in time to buy something and eat. It's a very practical, maybe even a very seemingly compassionate solution. Don't drag it out, Jesus. They're going to starve. Send them away.

But Jesus wanted to teach the disciples about more than just his compassion that day. He wanted them to see something about the nature of his power. So he tells them to gather up the food that they can find. Five loaves and two good-sized fish.

Probably enough for the small band of disciples and Jesus to have a simple meal. Certainly not enough for the massive crowd that's gathered. And what then takes place that day by the Sea of Galilee, as the sun is beginning to set, and the people are forming groups of 50 and 100 on the green springtime grass, what happens is a miracle.

[12:54] Jesus does something through his divine power that could not happen through ordinary, everyday means. The bread is broken and given, but it doesn't run out.

Each time it's broken, there's more, not less. Each time it's broken, it doesn't diminish. Each time it multiplies. And they all ate and were satisfied.

But how are we to explain this? I mean, even the disciples had a hard time kind of reckoning with it. And as we'll see in Mark's gospel, it happens twice. And they still don't understand. So I think we can be a little excused if we're thinking, this is a little hard to wrap our minds around, right?

What are we to make of it? Surely bread just can't multiply out of thin air. I mean, something can't come from nothing, right? And then let's pause for a moment right there.

Can something come from nothing? As creatures, of course, we can't make something out of nothing. But that's not true of the creator.

[14:07] In fact, the basic biblical understanding of creation is that God, the holy, loving, wise, triune God, made everything out of nothing. What creatures cannot do, God can and indeed has done.

And we're living proof of it. And so what's to say God could not choose to do it again? What's to say that God could not choose to take bread in his incarnate hands, bless it, break it, and give it.

And then in that moment, in that desolate place, to again make something out of nothing. But why did Jesus do it?

Why here? Why now? Well, you know, this wasn't the first time that God had fed his people in a desolate place with miraculous bread, right?

Remember the people of Israel having left Egypt in the Exodus, entering the wilderness with Moses as their leader, as their shepherd, as he is called?

[15:17] The people were hungry, complaining even. And what did God do? He gave them bread in a desolate place. Manna, they called it, which is Hebrew for what is it?

And as long as the people journeyed through the wilderness, God would provide each day with just enough for their needs. It was such a pivotal event in Israel's history that God even told them to put a container of manna in the Ark of the Covenant, in the central place of worship, so that the people would never forget that he alone was their provider and sustainer, their faithful God who alone could satisfy.

The same God who made the worlds from nothing in the act of creation, who made manna from nothing in the wilderness of Egypt, the same God was again on the move here in Mark chapter 6. God had promised, after all, to send a leader like Moses and like David. God promised again and again in the Old Testament that he would send the true shepherd of his people.

But this time, it would be different. There was a time coming when it would be different. As the prophets looked forward, especially Ezekiel, the prophet Ezekiel looked forward to a time when it wouldn't be a mere prophet like Moses or a mere king like David.

[16:44] No, there would be a time when God himself would come and shepherd his people. He himself would lead them and feed them. And at last, they would be secure. Listen to what Ezekiel 34 says in verses 11 through 16.

For thus says the Lord God, behold, I, I myself, will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so I will seek

out my sheep and I will rescue them from all places where they've been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness.

And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel by the ravines and in all the inhabited places of the country.

I will feed them with good pasture and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. They shall lie down in good grazing land and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord.

I will seek the lost and I will bring back the strayed and I will bind up the injured and I will strengthen the weak. I will feed them in justice. Now we know from Ezekiel's perspective that God brought the people back from Babylonian exile and settled them in the land.

[18:05] But this prophecy was looking forward to an even greater return from exile. And that's what the disciples were witnessing that day on the hills of Galilee.

The Lord God had come to fulfill his promise, to heal and rescue his people and to feed them in justice. And as Mark says, they all ate and were satisfied.

They all ate and were satisfied. Here's good news for weary souls, for hungry souls. Our true shepherd has come and what he gives can truly satisfy.

But as Mark's gospel unfolds, we see that Jesus, what he gives us, is more than just bread. He didn't come just to give us bread that fills our hungry stomachs.

Although, if we follow Jesus, we will surely care about physical hunger and we will care about meeting physical needs. Jesus came to do that, but much more. He came to give us a bread that lasts forever.

[19:14] You know those leftover pieces that the disciples gathered that day in those small baskets that they used to wear at their hips? That's what Mark has in mind. They go around, they gather the pieces, they put them in.

Those pieces would grow old and stale, wouldn't they? They wouldn't last forever. But Jesus had come to give something that would never grow old and never grow stale.

He came to give us his very self. It was ultimately his own body that would be broken and given. Broken and given on the cross so that our sins could be forgiven, so that we could know peace with God.

This is the power of Jesus to truly satisfy. This is how he truly brings something out of nothing. This is the good news for all who trust in Christ, that when we were dead in our trespasses and sins, God made us alive together with Christ.

Jesus takes the nothing of our failed moral record and through his death and resurrection, through himself being given and broken and handed out, he makes us something perfect and righteousness.

[20:31] He makes us a new creation. Friend, what are you looking to to satisfy you this morning? What are you chasing after to fill the ache, not in your stomach, but in your heart, in your soul?

What Jesus holds out to you is bread that will never grow old and never grow stale. It may look simple and unadorned at first.

It may look insufficient. But if you come to him as your shepherd, he promises to give you nothing less than himself, to forgive all your sins and to begin the process of making you a new creation. And notice in our story that there's more than enough. It's wonderful how God orchestrates redemptive history to display the glory of the gospel.

Here's what I mean. In the Old Testament, the manna given each day in the wilderness, if you remember those stories, you remember that it was just enough for each day's need. And once a week, it would be enough for two days so they didn't have to work on the Sabbath.

[21:44] Just enough, no more, no less. But when God ushers in the new covenant, when he sends his son, what we see is that there's more than enough. There's an abundance of food.

Twelve baskets are filled. One for each apostle as they helped with the distribution. Here's the abundant glory of the gospel.

What Christ provides is more than enough to cover all your sins, to feed your hungry soul, and to keep you secure until the end. Jesus truly has the power to satisfy.

But there's one last point to see here. Jesus is our true and good shepherd. He has the compassion to receive us, the power to satisfy us.

But last, what we see is that Jesus, our true shepherd, has the will to use us. He has the will to invite us in and to give us a part to play in the advance of his kingdom.

[22 : 48] After all, when the disciples come to Jesus and say in verse 36, Jesus, send the crowds away. Send them into the surrounding villages and countrysides to buy themselves something to eat. How does Jesus reply? He doesn't say, ha ha, don't worry.

I will give them something to eat. No, he says, you give them something to eat. You give them something to eat. But of course, the apostles don't have enough.

They don't have enough to feed such a large crowd. 200 denarii was over half a year's pay for a typical laborer in the first century. Half a year's pay. They don't have enough money to do that.

They are insufficient to the task. Okay, well, Jesus says, you don't have all that money. What do you have? We only have five loaves and two fish. And Jesus says, give me your five loaves and your two fish and watch what I can do with it.

And with those five loaves and two fish, a crowd the size of an entire village is fed. How about us?

[23 : 59] And our calling as a church to reach our city. We look at the obstacle sometimes and we think, there's no way we can do this.

It's impossible. And the reality is, if we're relying on our own strength or wisdom or resources or talents, then it is impossible. But if we take what we have and entrust it to the Lord Jesus, even if it feels like the only thing we have are five loaves and two fish in a city of 150,000 people, then it's not impossible.

The gospel can and will go forth. The kingdom of God can and will advance. It doesn't matter how small our gifts may seem.

His desire is to use us to do his work. What Jesus said to the apostles then, he still says to the church today, you give them something to eat.

Through our life together, through our corporate witness to the resurrected Jesus, through our acts of love and mercy, Jesus is inviting us to join his mission and to play our part in God's great story of redemption.

[25 : 16] That's the sort of shepherd Jesus is. He wants to bring you along and take what might seem little to you and use it for something great. That's the sort of shepherd Jesus is.

Full of compassion, full of power, inviting you and me as those who have been fed with his living bread to offer our gifts back to him that he might use them to still feed even more.

So brother, sister, don't feel as if there's no place for you in the mission of God. The church needs your gifts.

There's no lunch too small that it cannot be used to feed a multitude in Jesus' mission. You know, you might think you just came with one of those things that you, that's like the crackers and the lunch meat and the cheese.

Lunchables, right? There they are. You're like, I just got a Lunchable. What am I supposed to do in the kingdom of God? There's no gift, no talent so small that it cannot be used to bless and build up the church in profound and lasting ways.

[26 : 28] Your good shepherd has the will to use you for his glory. Your significance or your insignificance in the world's eyes, it doesn't mean that much to him.

Look at the apostles after all, right? I mean, talk about making something out of nothing. But that's still what our good shepherd's doing today. He's inviting you and me to come and to find that he's able to do through us what we could never do in and of ourselves.

And so, we no longer need to live like sheep without a shepherd because the true shepherd, the true king, has come, the Lord Jesus.

So run to him, friend. Give your life to him. He won't just receive you. He won't just satisfy you. He'll sweep your life up into a greater purpose than you've ever dreamed.

the kingdom of God. Now, that kingdom might not look like much now. To worldly eyes, to earthly eyes, to our limited vision, the kingdom might just look like a bunch of ragtag folks eating a rustic meal of bread and fish.

[27 : 42] church. But one day, friends, we will see it as it truly is. A banquet fit for kings and queens. A feast to satisfy for all eternity.

Because after all, that's who you are, church. Heirs of the kingdom. Daughters and sons of God. Preparing for a great feast to come.

And at our head, Jesus Christ, the great shepherd of the sheep. Let's pray together. Amen. Father, we take just a moment as we consider this passage and all of its depths.

We just pause before you with quiet hearts and quiet minds and we open our hands to you and we ask in the stillness of this moment that you would feed us.

Lord, we know there are many means that you use to support us and help us and guide us and lead us and to feed us and provide for us. But in this moment, Lord, we come back again to the great truth that it is you.

[29 : 24] Amen.