

YOU GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO EAT

Mark 6:30-44

Key Verse: 6:37a

But he answered, "You give them something to eat."

In today's passage, Jesus tells his disciples (and us), "You give them something to eat." Jesus wants us to overcome our selfish nature by learning his shepherd's heart for hungry people. May God help us to have faith that can feed spiritually hungry people with our five loaves and two fish!

I. HE HAD COMPASSION ON THEM (30-34)

Look at verse 30. *"The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught."* The disciples had just come back from their fieldwork training. They must have felt a sense of achievement. Interestingly the author Mark begins to refer to them as the "apostles." After the training mission, they were promoted from the "disciples," the learners, to the apostles, the ambassadors of Christ, for the definition of an apostle is "one who is sent out with mission." Jesus knew that they needed to rest for a while. But the demanding crowd would not let them. What did Jesus say to them? Look at verse 31. *"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 was concerned about his disciples' needs. So Jesus and his disciples went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place (32).

In fact, this was the third attempt for Jesus to give his disciples a short vacation (4:35, 5:1, 6:31). But many people who were watching their movement carefully saw them leaving and ran on foot from all the towns to get to the other side of the lake ahead of them (33). The crowd arrived there before Jesus' company did. They were waiting for them. The disciples couldn't believe their eyes. The crowd just wouldn't leave them alone. Understandably, the disciples were not so excited to see the crowd. Some probably murmured, "Not again." They were annoyed by the selfish behavior of the crowd. They were not happy because their vacation plan was frustrated for the third time. But how did Jesus see the crowd?

First, Jesus had compassion on them (34). The disciples were getting tired of the people. But Jesus saw the crowd with different eyes. Let us read verse 34: *"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 people came to Jesus for help. Each one had a personal problem; each considered his problem most serious. They were desperate. There were more than 5,000 people. To Jesus' eyes, they were like 5,000 orphans who were sick and hungry, without their parents to take care of them. They were lost because they had no shepherd who would lead them to God or teach them the truth of God. They were helpless. They were like sheep without a shepherd.

What does it mean Jesus saw the people like sheep without a shepherd? What would it be like to be sheep without a shepherd? Sheep are not the smartest animals.

They are not independent. They cannot take care of themselves. Sheep without a shepherd are easily lost. They are unprotected and vulnerable. They don't know where they are going and don't know what to do. They often endanger themselves by teetering on the edge of a cliff. They are also easy prey for the enemy. In Jesus' eyes, the crowd who came to him was like sheep without a shepherd. They were lost in their sins. They had no one to help them. No wonder they were desperate to come to Jesus.

Why didn't they have shepherds? Actually the religious leaders were supposed to take care of them. But they were preoccupied with their own desires and couldn't care less about the spiritual condition of the people. The political leaders like Herod were no help. These leaders were no shepherds. They did not view the people as their sheep. When a butcher looks at sheep, he sees meat. When a textile company executive looks at sheep, he sees wool. When a wolf looks at sheep, he sees dinner. When a hired hand looks at sheep, he sees only his paycheck. However, when Jesus, the good shepherd, looked at the crowd, he saw them as "sheep without a shepherd" (34). They had no one to care for them. They were spiritually starved, materially impoverished, and, worst of all, nobody seemed to care.

But Jesus cared. Verse 34 says that Jesus had compassion on them. What is compassion? It is a person's deep awareness of the suffering of another. This is the heart of God when he sent his one and only Son Jesus to save us. A man was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan stopped and had compassion on him. He bandaged the man's wounds and carried him to an inn where he nursed him through the night. The next day he paid the bill and gave the innkeeper his credit card, saying, "If he needs more, charge it to me" (Lk 10:30-37). Jesus told this story of what we know as the "Good Samaritan" to teach an expert in the law what it means to have compassion. The story teaches us the compassion of our Lord Jesus. Jesus does not pass us by on the other side when we are hurt and helpless. Jesus had compassion on the crowd of people because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

Second, Jesus taught them the word of God. When Jesus saw the crowd with his compassionate eyes, what did he do for them? Look at verse 34b. "*So he began teaching them many things.*" He taught them the word of God. Jesus knew the people had many immediate problems that they wanted to be solved. But he taught them the word of God first. What an impractical thing to do! It was like telling a hungry student, "Let's study the Bible." But that is exactly what Jesus did. Why? It was because only the word of God could set them free from their bondage of sin. Only the word of God can help us to know God personally. Most of all, only the word of God can give us, sinners, eternal life! Jesus taught them that while he understood their immediate needs, they had to pay attention to the needs of their souls, their spiritual life. Once some followers of Jesus left him because they did not get practical benefits they were expecting from him. Then Jesus asked his disciples, "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." (Jn 6:68) Jesus did his best to plant the word of truth in the hearts of the crowd. He taught them the word of God, because the word of God can give them abundant life in God.

Sometimes it seems to be better to help people with some material things than teach them the word of God. It would be more appealing to many students if we have workshops on personal finance or tips on home and car purchases than studying the word of God through our weekly 1:1 Bible studies. The problem is that money cannot solve the most fundamental problem facing the mankind. Money is good, but it is no substitute for the life-giving word of God. We must remember that teaching the word of God is the best way to help people, just as Jesus taught the people the word of God.

II. "YOU GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO EAT" (35-44)

Quite a long time had elapsed since Jesus began teaching the crowd the word of God. Meanwhile, the disciples were waiting patiently for him to finish his Bible study with the crowd. This was supposed to be a vacation for them. They were getting hungry. But Jesus' sermon seemed to be interminable. Every time they thought he was coming to a conclusion, he would get fresh wind and start again. The sun was setting over the western horizon, but the voice of Jesus was getting stronger and stronger. The disciples were getting hungrier and hungrier. Their stomachs were growling. Their patience began to wear out.

Finally, they could not wait any longer. They came to Jesus with a suggestion. What did they say to him? 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 they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat."* Their suggestion was "Send the people away." The disciples saw the situation with their calculating minds and concluded that the best way to handle the crowd was to dismiss them so that each could take responsibility for his own food and lodging. Their suggestion was quite reasonable. There were no grocery stores or fast-food restaurants nearby. Jesus and they did not have any money. Why not let the crowd take care of themselves? But behind their reasonable thinking was a hidden motive to escape the responsibility of caring for the people. The disciples were reasonable, but lacked a sense of responsibility. Most of all, they did not understand the compassionate heart of Jesus.

What did Jesus say to them? Let us read verse 37a. *"You give them something to eat."* Wow! Jesus told them they should take care of the crowd of 5,000. What was their reaction? They said, "That would take eight months of a man's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?" They quickly calculated, perhaps with Philip's help (Jn 6:7), that it would take eight months of a man's wages (e.g., \$10 per hour x 8 hour a day x 5 days a week x 32 weeks = \$12,800.) They didn't have that kind of money. Even if they had, it would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite (because \$12,800 for the 10,000 people, including women and children, would give only \$1.28 per person—only enough to buy a hamburger for each). But Jesus said to them, "You give them something to eat." When can we learn from this?

First, Jesus teaches a sense of responsibility. Jesus knew that the disciples did not have that kind of money. Still Jesus wanted them to have a sense of responsibility for the people. Their spiritual problem was that they did not feel responsible for the crowd. They attempted to escape the responsibility. They thought they could not feed them because they had no money. So they did not even try to find a way to feed the people. Jesus wanted his disciples to be responsible for the crowd whether they had

money or not. He wanted them to be the shepherds for the people who were like sheep without a shepherd.

We human beings are noble because God has endowed us with a sense of responsibility. Genesis 1:28 says, “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’” This is an important truth about our life. God did not create us in his own image to live a selfish life and perish in sin. God gave us the mission to be fruitful. We have a purpose in life—that is to be fruitful in God. When we plan our future, we must remember this basic truth.

To have a sense of responsibility is to feel responsible for the 5,000 people whether we have money or not. We can have a sense of responsibility when we come to know the heart of God towards his people. David was a man after God’s own heart. He was the youngest son of Jesse and was a shepherd boy. He did not just enjoy all the attention given to the youngest son. Instead, he became a responsible shepherd for his father’s sheep. He often risked his life for them. When a lion or bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, David would go after the ferocious animal. When the marauder turned on him, he seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. Of course, the young shepherd David knew that by fighting with brutal beasts he was risking his life. But he was not afraid to risk his life because of his sense of responsibility for his father’s flock. Later, God anointed David to be king over Israel so that he could take care of his sheep, the people of Israel.

Second, Jesus teaches a shepherd’s heart. Jesus had taught the crowd from the early morning till sundown. Now, Jesus knew that they were so hungry that they would faint if they went back without eating. Jesus also knew that he and his disciples had no money to feed them. But Jesus wanted to feed them anyway. This is a shepherd’s heart.

In history there were many who imitated the shepherd’s heart of Jesus. For example, Henryk Sienkiewicz (1846-1916) had a great shepherd’s heart for his people in Poland who were suffering from the oppression of the Russian Empire. Out of his shepherd’s heart he wrote the novel “Quo Vadis?” This book became an inspiration for his people to fight bravely for their country.

It is amazing to know God’s shepherd heart. In order to save sinful humanity, he sent his one and only Son, Jesus. God’s shepherd heart is fully manifested in Jesus’ life. Once, Jesus was walking along the street with his disciples when they saw a man born blind begging. As soon as his disciples saw the man, they became very fatalistic and said to Jesus, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (Jn 9:2) What did Jesus say of the blind man? Jesus had no time to be fatalistic about him; his heart went out to him. He was ready to heal him. But Jesus had no medical equipment with him. He had nothing. Yet, Jesus did not give up. He spat on the ground, made some mud with his saliva and put it on the man’s eyes (Jn 9:6). This sounds funny. But Jesus’ shepherd heart brought a miracle on the man’s life.

Third, Jesus teaches what it means to have faith in God. “You give them something to eat.” What did Jesus mean by this when he knew well that his disciples did not have money? Jesus wanted to teach them to have faith in God. Jesus wanted to

teach his disciples to have faith that all things are possible if they believed in God. Jesus wanted them to learn that they could feed the 5,000 people even when they had no money, if they had faith in God. He wanted them to feed the crowd by faith. The secret he wanted them to learn was to turn their attention to Jesus instead of digging their pockets. Here we also learn that we cannot do anything by ourselves but we can do great things if we have faith in God. We can study the word of God faithfully with SU students and see how God raises 12 disciples of Jesus if we have faith in God. Let us repent our lack of faith when we feel like saying things like, "But Lord, I just don't have enough time to feed your sheep. I am tired after my hard day at work. I don't have the talent and personality to take care your sheep." Instead, let us say, "Lord, thank you for your compassion for us. Help me to have compassion for young people on our campus!"

Fourth, five loaves and two fish (38-44). 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."* Jesus asked his disciples, "Go and see." Jesus didn't want them to give up. He wanted them to be men of possibility. He wanted them to find what they could find. When they looked around, they found a boy with his lunch box. It had 5 small barley loaves and two fish. It wasn't enough for even one person. But they brought the lunch box to Jesus.

When the disciples brought the five loaves and two fish to Jesus, what did he do? 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, Jesus gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to set before 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 told them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass (39). So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties (40). Jesus co-worked with his disciples by asking them make people sit down on the grass. Jesus wanted his disciples to participate in the work of God by doing small things. Jesus wanted them to learn faith through their personal involvement. The disciples were environment makers for this event.

What happened? Jesus took the five loaves and two fish and, looking up to heaven, he thanked God and prayed that God would feed his children (41). Then God blessed him, and enough bread and fish came out of the five loaves and two fish to feed five thousand people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish (42-43). We must not despair for having only five loaves and two fish. Instead, we must bring what we have to Jesus. Then Jesus will bless our five loaves and two fish abundantly to feed his people. We must believe that God will accept our small one-to-one Bible studies as our five loaves and two fish and bless this country abundantly.

In this passage, Jesus commands us, "You give them something to eat." Jesus wants us to have a sense of responsibility. He wants us to learn his compassionate shepherd's heart. May God help us not to give up but to "go and see" what we have! May God help us to bring our five loaves and two fish to Jesus so that he can bless us and our friends abundantly!