

The Good Shepherd

Mark 6:30-44

In this story, the only miracle reported in all four gospels, Jesus picks up on a theme woven through the Old Testament, of God's people as sheep in need of a shepherd. The same theme extends throughout the New Testament as Jesus self-identifies as *the* good shepherd (Jn. 10:1), his people as sheep (Jn. 10:11, 16) and pastors as his under-shepherds (1 Pet. 5:1-2). The banquet hosted by Herod Antipas was attended by the nobles and elite of Galilee, had food prepared by gourmet chefs, had entertainment of exotic dancing, and climaxed with the calloused and cowardly execution of John the Baptist. The second feast was hosted by Jesus, attended by the common people of the land, had food provided by Christ, had exposition of the truth by the Son of God, and climaxed by being gathered and fed on the green grass by the great shepherd. As Christ's sheep with opportunities to shepherd one another, this passage is a goldmine.

The Shepherd Sees

The disciples return from their mission to tell Jesus all they did and taught (v30). They talked to him just as we do in prayer. They had just been out for some time, and still people were swarming such that they couldn't even eat, so Jesus called them out to a desolate place by boat (vv31-33). Jesus doesn't always take time for himself to eat (cf. 3:20), but he sees their need and takes action. People recognize and meet them at the desolate place, which isn't anymore. He doesn't see disturbing or annoying people, but arrested by compassion, sees sheep without a shepherd (v34). He knows their need his ability, and so he serves. He teaches many things, so long that the disciples have to tell him it's late, they're in the middle of nowhere, so send them away (vv34-36). Jesus sees opportunity; he knows his sheep and they hear his voice (Jn. 10:14).

The Shepherd Leads

His response to the disciples is startling: "You give them something to eat" (v37). They respond with why they can't obey. This whole scene stretches the disciples to the point of this sarcastic question. But Jesus' command to feed is a compliment, demonstrating his great confidence in the disciples who bore his power and authority (6:7, 12). They're still training with Jesus, but soon will be on their own. He both goes before them but then expects them to charge. He calls the play but gives them the ball. We don't do what we're told because we think it's reasonable or feasible or because we feel like it. Expect the opposite, and revel in being stretched. This is what death by discipleship looks like. We're given faith to move mountains so we can move them (cf. Ps. 18:29). We need to pray like John Knox, knowing the only thing we have to lose is our cowardice.

The Shepherd Feeds

God the Father was always the shepherd of Israel (Ps. 23:1), but there were also supposed to be shepherd-leaders watching over the people (Ez. 34:5; 1 Kgs. 22:17; Zech. 10:2). To speak of "sheep without a shepherd" is to say Israel lacks a leader, a king. So the prophets prophesied of a shepherd king who would be God himself, feed the people, and lead in righteousness (Ez. 34:15, 23-24; Mic. 5:4). That king is here. This true shepherd will give his life for the sheep (Jn. 10:11). Shepherds either feed people like Jesus or feed on them (6:27; Jude 1:12). Jesus fills the hearts of the people with his word and then meets their physical needs. His grace isn't distributed in crumbs, but everyone is satisfied and twelve full baskets are leftover (vv42-43). He satisfies those who seek him, turning desolate places into green meadows full of friends and food. Moses wanted a successor so that after his death "the congregation of the LORD may not be as sheep that have no shepherd" (Num. 27:17-18). Joshua had the Spirit, but still Israel flailed in the Promised Land. The apostles received the Spirit in greater power, and did better. Jesus is still our shepherd. We hear his voice in the preached word (Rom. 10:14). We gather into organized groups, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Eph. 4:11). Unmistakably, Jesus took, blessed, broke and gave the food, exactly how he would at the Last Supper and command us to always do (v41; 14:22).

NOTES FOR LITTLE SAINTS

Today's Passage: Mark 6:34-44

34 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. 35 And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. 36 Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." 37 But he answered 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 it to them to eat?" 38 And he said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." And when they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." 39 Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. 40 So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. 41 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. 42 And they all ate and were satisfied. 43 And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. 44 And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men.

1. What does Jesus see the crowd of people are like, and how does this make him feel (verse 34)?
2. This is a huge crowd of _____ men (verse 44). They are nowhere near a store, and yet Jesus tells the disciples to feed them. What things do your parents or God ask you to do that seem hard? Why should you try them anyway with a good attitude?
3. How did the people feel after they ate and how much was leftover (verses 42-43)?
4. Draw a picture of this crowd eating fish and bread together on the green grass.

Memory Verse to Recite Next Week:

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. --Mark 6:41