

Well, it's January 15, and most of us are two weeks into our New Year's diet! And let's be honest; as we look back on the holidays, our minds often go back to meals we shared with family and friends. So much of our life happens around the table, doesn't it?

What's interesting is the Bible is packed full of stories and rituals featuring people at the table eating together. In the Old Testament, Israel's yearly calendar was punctuated by sacred feasts. The Feasts of Weeks and Tabernacles were joyful celebrations around the table. And then you get to the New Testament and the life of Jesus. Have you noticed in the gospels how often Jesus is found eating with others? It's like he ate his way through the gospels! Jesus did a lot of ministry around the dinner table.

But Jesus took this one step further. In John 6, he was commenting on how the Israelites received manna in the wilderness.

"Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." [And then, when the people asked for this bread.] Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." John 6:32-35

So now, this bread has become a symbol of the life Jesus came to give us. We're not talking about physical life, but spiritual life, eternal life which begins now. Remember how Jesus said, *"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full"* (John 10:10b). The life Jesus came to give isn't boring or dull. Life with him is full and exciting. It's thrilling! It's an adventure!

As we continue in the Gospel of Mark, we come to another meal in chapter 8. It's a really big meal. Four thousand people are fed in this meal. Now you may be thinking, "Wait a minute! We already did this. This is like a Hollywood rerun!" And it's true. Back in Mark 6, there's another big meal where Jesus fed 5,000 men. So in the Gospel of Mark, there are not one but two feedings. In fact, they're so similar some scholars think they're the same event.

- Both stories take place in deserted settings.
- In both, there's a large crowd of hungry people with nothing to eat.
- In both Jesus has compassion on the crowd.
- In both Jesus asks his disciples, "How many loaves do you have?"

- In both Jesus has the crowd recline.
- In both Jesus gives blesses and breaks the loaves.
- In both Jesus engages the disciples to distribute the bread and fish.
- In both, the people eat and are satisfied.
- In both leftovers are gathered.
- And in both Jesus dismisses the crowd and then departs on a boat.

But despite the similarities, these are two different events. There are some big differences between these two feedings, which I'll point out as we go along. But, notice in verse 1, Mark begins by saying, *"During those days another large crowd gathered."* When he says "another" he's referring back to the large crowd gathered in chapter 6. And it's clear this large crowd gathered in a different location than the earlier one. Jesus fed the first crowd on the western side of the Sea of Galilee, which was an area primarily inhabited by Jews. But if you look at the context, you'll see this crowd in chapter 8 gathered east of the Sea of Galilee, which was primarily inhabited by Gentiles. In chapter 7, Jesus is in the city of Tyre where he frees a gentile woman's daughter from a demon. Later he's in the region of Decapolis, named for its ten cities, populated mostly by Gentiles. So when we come to Mark 8, Jesus is still in gentile country.

Now, as we walk through this story, I want us to look at what it teaches us about this bread of life Jesus came to give us. Why does he give us this bread? How does this bread get distributed? What does this bread do for us? And who is this bread of life for?

Why does he give us this bread of life?

During those days another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance." Mark 8:1-3

Mark begins, *"During those days..."*, which shows Jesus is still in Decapolis. This large crowd of men, women, and children has gathered around him. He calls his 12 disciples to himself and speaks to them. And here's a subtle but important difference from the first feeding. Here, Jesus takes the initiative. In the first feeding, he responded to the disciples who pointed out to him

the crowd must be hungry. Here, Jesus brings the issue front and center. And notice he declares his compassion for them.

That's the same word used in chapter 6, although there Mark simply reports Jesus' compassion on the crowd, here Jesus himself declares it. "*I have compassion for these people.*" Remember, the word compassion describes a gut-wrenching emotion. He doesn't just kind of feel bad for them; he aches for them. Notice also the reason for this. In chapter 6, it was because they were like "sheep without a shepherd," but here he says it's because they've been with him three days and if he sends them home hungry, they'll collapse on the way. Decapolis was a very isolated area; the terrain was rugged.

The word Jesus uses for remain in verse 2 is rare and indicates a strong commitment to Jesus. They haven't followed Jesus for three days out of convenience. They weren't just looking for a handout. No! They're hungry for the truth. They're hungry for that abundant life he came to give. Jesus sees that. But he also cares deeply about their physical needs, and so he raises the issue of food to his disciples. He doesn't want to send them away hungry.

I love that about Jesus. He deeply cares about our spiritual needs, our need for that abundant and eternal life he came to bring. That was his primary mission—to bring salvation to us. But he also cares about our physical needs. So he healed people. He fed people. You know, "Give us this day, our daily bread," the big things like salvation come from him, but so do the little things like food and shelter. And it all starts with his compassion.

Why does Jesus give us this bread of life? Because he cares so deeply, it pains him. Do you think of Jesus in that way? Do you think of God in that way? Do you know when he sees you, he sees your need rather than your sin? Maybe your life is out of control. Maybe you're lost. Maybe you're hungry for something more than what you've been feeding on. He sees you. And when he sees you, he's not angry; he's full of compassion. So this bread of life comes from the initiative and compassion of Jesus.

How does this bread of life get distributed?

Notice also how this bread gets distributed. In verse 3, Jesus brought up the issue of food—the crowd is starved! And then, in verse 4, "*His disciples answered, 'But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?'*" It's like, "Hey, Jesus. We're in the middle of nowhere. It's not like there's an In-N-Out around the corner." And that was true. They're in the middle of nowhere!

But you'd think after what Jesus did in feeding the 5,000, they wouldn't have to ask that question, right? I mean, are they that dense? Or maybe they just didn't want to presume Jesus would automatically repeat the same miracle. Either way, Jesus asks them the same question he did in the first feeding, "*How many*

loaves do you have?' Jesus asked" (v. 5). Last time it was five loaves and two fish. This time they reply, "seven."

He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. When he had taken the seven loaves and given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people, and they did so. They had a few small fish as well; he gave thanks for them also and told the disciples to distribute them. vv. 6-7

So, just as in chapter 6, Jesus engages the disciples in distributing the bread. Mind you; he didn't have to do that. He could have just said a word and miraculously had a five-course meal appear in every person's lap. But he wants his disciples to be part of the process. And this is exactly how he works today. He engages us in the process of distributing this bread of life! Notice how he does this.

First, he shows us that we don't have the resources in ourselves to pull this off. They only had seven loaves and a few small fish to feed 4,000 people. I don't think this was any surprise to Jesus, do you? But notice he asks them, "*How many loaves do you have?'*" to remind them they don't have the resources to meet this need. We know Jesus has every intention to meet this need, but the first thing he does is show them they don't have what it takes. Let me tell you something: You and I don't have what it takes! Our Lord wants to use us as a distributor of this Bread of his Life, but in the process, he'll constantly bring us to a place of helplessness where we see we have to depend on him for everything.

But don't forget this: you do have something to offer him. Even if it's not enough, don't use that as an excuse to do nothing. Start with what you have. You may not be able to solve world hunger, but you can help feed a few children through any number of great organizations. You may not be able to evangelize the Bay Area, but you can reach out to your next-door neighbor. Far too often, we don't do anything because we can't do everything. But he wants us to simply offer him what we do have.

The next thing Jesus does is give thanks, break the bread, and give it to his disciples to distribute. Again, this is a symbol of his life, being blessed, broken, and distributed to the world. Later, at the Last Supper, he'd break the bread and say, "*Take eat, this is my body broken for you.*" In fact, when Jesus gives thanks, the Greek word is *eucharisteo*, from which we get our word eucharist. Mark uses this word in chapter 14 for when Jesus blessed the bread at the Lord's Supper.

Here, after also giving thanks for a few small sardine-like fish, Jesus hands the food to his disciples to distribute. But in the hands of Jesus, the bread and fish just keep coming. No doubt, the disciples had to keep returning to Jesus, time and time again, to get a fresh supply to pass out. They have to keep coming back to him, just like we do! He uses us to distribute his life to others, but we have to keep coming back to him for the resources to do so. We want God to do things in our lives. We pray he'll use

us. We can bring the bread, but he must multiply it. We can fill the jars with water, but he must turn it into wine. But start with what you have.

This reminds me of the first time I took my son, Matt, fishing. We were having a great time, but the fish weren't biting. I was worried because I really wanted him to catch his first fish. Finally, after a long wait, I felt a nibble. Now, if you know fishing, you know the next thing to do is set the hook. Once the hook is set properly the rest is a piece of cake. So I set it and made sure the fish was on, and then what do you think I did? Reel it in? No. I handed the pole to Matt and watched with great delight as he landed his first fish. Why? You see, it was a greater delight to watch him land the fish than do it myself.

I think that's how Jesus felt. He could have done this by himself, but he wants us to have the joy of participating in his mission of bringing his life to people. I think Jesus had a huge smile on his face as the disciples passed out that bread. So offer what you have to Jesus, keep coming back to him, and he'll give you more than enough to meet that need.

Last week, one of your mission partners, the Babiones, was here. In fact, Bill stayed at our house. But I remember when we sent Bill and Wini off to Albania. That country had been shut off to Christian missionaries for decades. It finally opened up after the Iron Curtain fell. They went there with Cru to reach out to university students. They had nothing. They didn't know the language or the culture but they went, and they served there for ten years before they moved to Budapest. Last week, I was there in Albania, speaking at their annual Cru staff conference. There are now 120 Albanians serving on Cru staff in Albania! They're in universities, board rooms, and soccer fields. Thousands of Albanians are grabbing hold of the bread of life because Bill and Wini handed Jesus their seven loaves and a few small fish and were available to him!

So, we've seen this bread comes from Jesus out of his compassion. We've also seen that he engages us in distributing this life, and look next at what the results are.

What is the result in people's lives of eating this bread of life?

The people ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. About four thousand were present. After he had sent them away, he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the region of Dalmanutha. vv. 8-10

The end result of all this was that 4,000 people ate and were satisfied. Isn't that great? That word is the same one the disciples used in verse 4, where they asked, "*Where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?*" Literally, that should read, "Who is able in this remote region to satisfy these people with bread?" The answer is supplied in verse 8, only Jesus can

satisfy the people! That's not just talking about a full belly. That's talking about a full soul. Only Jesus, the Bread of Life, can provide ultimate satisfaction. This is emphasized even more when it mentions there were "*seven basketfuls of broken pieces left over.*" There are two words for "basket" in Greek. The word in chapter 6 speaks of a small lunch basket. The word here is different—it's a large basket, like a large duffel bag you take on a journey. So there was lots of leftover food, plenty to go around!

You know, I think the disciples were exhausted after all of this. I mean, back and forth, carrying loads of fish and chips to 4,000 people. That's no small task! But I think there was a deep satisfaction in their souls when it was all said and done. Every human on this planet has a hunger, a soul-craving that food or fun or even family can't satisfy. Only the bread of life, which comes from Jesus can satisfy that craving. I like the way John Piper puts it. "God is most glorified in us when we are satisfied in him." The satisfaction of the crowd and the disciples glorified Jesus that day. How satisfied are you? The things of this world won't satisfy you. But Jesus will if you let him.

Who is the bread of life for?

But we still haven't answered the most important question: Who is this bread for? I believe this is the real reason Mark included this second feeding story. You might recall from Mark 6 the 5,000 men were there to incite a Jewish revolution against the Romans. But there's none of that here. Here, the real revolution is this bread of life, which was not just for Jewish people, but for the Gentiles; it's for all people!

There are some hints in the way Mark tells this story that show this is the main thing going on here. First, remember in Mark 7:27, where Jesus, speaking about bread, told a gentile woman that the Jews, especially his disciples, should be satisfied first. Nevertheless, Jesus responded to that woman's faith and cast a demon out of her daughter. Jesus satisfied the gentile woman, which raised the question of whether he'll also satisfy a crowd of Gentiles. And that's exactly what he does here in chapter 8.

Another hint is found in the number of leftover baskets. Remember, 12 baskets were left over in the first feeding. That number represents Israel, like the 12 tribes. But in the feeding of the 4,000, there were just seven leftover baskets filled. That number signifies perfection or completeness, as in the seven days of creation. Here, seven points to the completion or the fullness of Christ's mission throughout the world to every tongue, tribe, and nation.

I even wonder if the real reason Jesus brought up the hunger of this crowd is that the disciples wanted nothing to do with feeding these people. These were unclean Gentiles! Jews don't eat with Gentiles. I mean, they'd have to touch the crowds as they distributed the food. And when they collected the leftovers, those filthy Gentiles had their germs all over the food. Devout Jews would

never have touched the leftovers, let alone eaten them. But Jesus wants us to know this life he came to offer is for everyone. We know Jesus took this even one step further and regularly ate meals with tax collectors and sinners. These were those thought to be flagrantly wicked: traders, cheaters, prostitutes, criminals, and the like. They had no place in regular society. But Jesus sat down and shared meals with them. He took his ministry and kingdom beyond the barriers of race and culture.

In fact, this is why this feeding of the 4,000 points to another meal to come which we'll all participate in together. This meal prefigures the great Messianic feast, the marriage supper of the Lamb, prophesied in Isaiah 25:6, "*On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines.*" This is what the Messiah would do. And Jesus did it. The ultimate fulfillment of that prophecy is found in Revelation 19:7 "*Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready.*" Later the angel says, "*Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!*" Do you see how important it is that two miraculous feeding stories are recorded? Because salvation now is for all who believe, just like the Messianic feast to come is for all who believe and eat this bread of life.

Jesus came to offer full and satisfying life to all people, and he uses us to distribute it.

It strikes me that this life Jesus came to bring is both radically inclusive and radically exclusive. It's radically inclusive because it's offered to all people. There's no group or category of people who can't take and eat this bread he offers. This is why, since the Day of Pentecost, believers have taken this offer of life to the ends of the earth. This is why we send out missionaries like the Babioness to Albania. This is why we'd build a hospital for Muslim women suffering from obstetric fistula in Niger, the poorest country in Africa. This is why you would take time off work and join a team going to Honduras. And it's not just people in places like Albania, Niger, and Honduras. It's people in your town and your neighborhood. It's people you might tend to keep your distance from.

There's a powerful urge in all of us to include some people and exclude others. C.S. Lewis called it the lure of the "inner ring." We exclude people because they don't meet our standards of beauty, intelligence, racial purity, success, or even godliness. But, to be like Jesus, we have to move out of our inner ring and look for people on the margins. Like him, we may have to walk a long way to do it. We may have to cross over into places where people

are different and even threatening to us. I mean, who do you invite to your dinner table? Do you invite people who you might be just a little embarrassed to be seen with? Do you invite people you might tend to "otherize?"

The life Jesus came to bring is radically inclusive, but it's also radically exclusive. Do you know why? Because it only comes from Jesus. There's no other source of this eternal, abundant, and deeply satisfying life than the person of Jesus. You have to come to him. You can't find it through meditation or mindfulness. You can't find it by connecting with nature. You can't find it by being kind to the world around you. You can't find it by putting the right person in political office. You can't even find it in the 49ers winning the Super Bowl. You find it in Jesus. John put it this way, "*God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life*" (1 John 5:11-12).

Do you have the Son?

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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