

JOHNS CREEK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Disciples Join in Ministry

Mark 6:30-44

Sunday, July 30, 2023

Rev. Max Vincent, Senior Pastor

We have been discussing discipleship according to the Gospel of Mark. Disciples begin by showing up to follow Jesus. Last week, we talked about how disciples trust in Jesus. Today, we look at how disciples join in the ministry of Jesus. Disciples are not fans, cheering Jesus on while he does his work. Disciples become a part of the work Jesus is doing in the world. Jesus invites us to use the resources we have and continue his work of offering help, healing, and hope to others. Our text is from **Mark 6:30-44**:

³⁰ The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹He 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. ³²And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. ³³Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. ³⁴As 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. ³⁵When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, “This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; ³⁶send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat.” ³⁷But he answered them, “You give them something to eat.” They said to him, “Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?” ³⁸And he said to them, “How many loaves have you? Go and see.” When they had found out, they said, “Five, and two fish.” ³⁹Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. ⁴¹Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. ⁴²And all ate and were filled; ⁴³and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. ⁴⁴Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.

One day, Jesus gathers the disciples and sends them out to do what he has been doing. They go in pairs to teach what Jesus is teaching and to pray for sick people. They travel throughout the region. They had an excellent response to their preaching and saw many people healed. They return to Jesus, tired from all their travels but excited and wanting to share all they have done. However, so many others are crowding around Jesus, wishing to hear his teaching and needing prayers for healing, that Jesus and the disciples cannot even find time to enjoy a meal together. Jesus suggests they get in the boat and go to a deserted place to relax, catch up, and hopefully share something to eat.

They enter the boat and head across the Sea of Galilee towards an isolated place. The crowd sees the boat's direction, recognizes them, and hurries on foot, reaching the destination before the boat. Word spreads that people are going to see Jesus. People leave the nearby towns, causing the crowd to grow larger. As the boat comes around a bend in the shoreline, instead of a deserted place, there is a mass of people lining the shore, just waiting for Jesus and the disciples to arrive.

Instead of changing direction and trying to find another deserted spot, Jesus looks at the crowd with compassion, leaves the boat, and begins teaching them. He spends all day teaching them, and it grows late. The disciples come to Jesus and say, “Let's send the people away so they can get some food. They have been out here all day listening to your teaching and need food. Remember, we came out here because we couldn't even find time to eat.” The disciples are worried that the people will grow faint in the wilderness.

Jesus, touched by the disciples' worry for the crowd, has an even better plan. “Rather than send the people away, you give them something to eat.”

There's a difference between worry and compassion. Worry recognizes that something is not right. Worry

may even raise a voice to be sure others know things are wrong. Compassion moves to action. Compassion moves Jesus to leave the boat when he sees the crowd and spend the day with them when he has planned a quiet getaway with the disciples. Now Jesus tries to convert the disciples' worry to compassion, moving them to help address this concern for food.

The disciples respond in frustration, "We are in a wilderness. There are no stores here; even if there were, we wouldn't have enough money to buy food for all these people. If we had enough money, there are still no stores. Where would we find enough bread for this crowd?"

Sometimes worry can paralyze us. We can get so caught up in how big a need is or how many needs there are that we feel the need is too great, our resources too limited. We start to get so focused on what we don't have that we lose sight of what we do have.

Years ago, I was serving a small church in a farming community. One of our members saw a story on the news about the need for childcare in America. She talked about this constantly. She even led a women's mission study on the need for childcare, complete with national statistics and charts of need versus availability. To her credit, she was trying to address this issue. However, the longer she talked about it, the more church members just got overwhelmed. We were a small church with limited facilities. Most of our members were older adults who could not help run a daycare. Our facilities would not be up to code for full-time daycare. We got good at cataloging all that we did not have. Then suddenly, we learned something important.

The community we were in did not need full-time daycare. Most of the parents worked in the nearby city and took their children to daycare close to where they worked. An issue in our community was elementary school children who left school and went home without any adults in the house for about 3 hours. What the community needed was some after-school care program. From all our study of why we could not provide full-time daycare, we learned that we had seven classrooms that could accommodate about ten kids each. The local elementary school principal estimated that 50-60 children needed some after-school care. Working with the local school, we found teachers and assistants. One of our members, a former vice principal, became the director of our after-school care ministry. We started with 50 children. When the demand grew by 70, the church converted a former library into another

classroom to provide a safe place for as many kids as possible. We were amazed that five afternoons a week, we had more people in our classrooms than could sit comfortably in our sanctuary.

After the disciples describe how impossible Jesus' request is because of all they do not have, Jesus asks, "What do you have? Go and see." They scour around and return to Jesus, I'm sure, with a smirk and say, "We have five loaves and two fish. What will you do with that, Jesus, in light of so many people?" Five loaves and two fish barely sound like a meal for Jesus and the disciples. What could that possibly mean in the presence of such a large crowd?

Jesus asks the disciples to organize the people in groups on the grass. He is behaving like the good shepherd of Psalm 23. He saw the crowd like sheep without a shepherd. Now he causes them to lay down in green pastures beside the still waters of the Sea of Galilee. He has restored their soul through his teaching and is about to prepare a table for them. Jesus takes the bread, blesses and breaks it, and has the disciples distribute the bread and the fish to the people. After everyone eats, there are 12 baskets of leftovers. Over 5,000 fed, 12 baskets of leftovers, all from 5 loaves and 2 fish. It barely looked like enough to feed the disciples. Now each disciple has a basket of food.

This is probably Jesus' most familiar miracle. All four gospels tell about the feeding of the 5,000. Many of you probably heard the start of the scripture reading, and your minds raced ahead to baskets of leftovers, even before I had read about the five loaves and two fish. The story may be so familiar that we miss some significant details.

The Bible is full of miraculous feeding stories. When the Israelites escaped slavery in Egypt, only to wind up in the wilderness without water and food, God sent manna on the ground in the morning and quail from the skies. For years the Israelites lived off that miraculous food. This food is often celebrated in the Psalms and Prophets of the Old Testament as part of God's saving grace towards the Israelites.

During a drought and famine, the prophet Elijah met a widow and asked her for some bread. She said she barely had enough flour and oil to make a small loaf for herself and her son. Elijah said God would make sure the flour and oil would not run out until the drought was over. She brought Elijah a small loaf of bread and made another to share with her son. She, her son, and Elijah ate from what came from those jars for three years

(I Kings 17:8ff). What seemed like barely enough to feed two people one meal sustained three for years through God's grace.

One day a man brought a gift of twenty loaves of bread to the prophet Elisha. Elisha said to give the bread to the people. The man said this won't be enough for 100 people. Elisha said to give it to them, and there will still be some leftover (II Kings 4:42ff). The man gave, God blessed, and there were baskets of leftovers.

Sometimes we get so focused on the bounty of the leftovers in Jesus' feeding the crowd that we lose sight of the change Jesus works in the disciples. They come to him worried about food, and Jesus invites them to join him in ministry. The disciples not only bring forward the loaves and fish, but they also help shepherd this crowd into groups on the grass. They distribute the food and gather up the leftovers. They join Jesus in this work. Disciples join Jesus in ministry.

But what amazes me more and more about this story is that the disciples hand over what they have to Jesus. They, too, are in a deserted place. They came to this place because they were so busy with the crowd before that they couldn't even find time to eat. Five loaves and two fish were all they had, and they handed it over to Jesus.

Indeed, what they offered seemed like little before such a large crowd. It would have been easy to become paralyzed by what seemed inadequate to the need and keep what seemed unable to address the need for themselves, but the disciples give Jesus what they have. Jesus then blesses it and gives it to them. Then they discover there is more than enough.

When we take what we have and offer it to Jesus, we may be amazed at what he makes possible.

Thanks be to God.



11180 Medlock Bridge Road Johns Creek, GA 30097
770-497-8215 www.johnscreekumc.org