

December 4/5, 2004

*The Good News About Jesus According to Mark*

## **To Know Him Is To Trust Him**

**Mark 6:30-56**

Pastor Bryan Clark

We have been celebrating Jesus as Savior, which is the second theme of Advent. When Jesus instituted Communion there was both an intentional looking back and a looking forward. We look at the price of our sin. But He also said, “Do this until I return,” which was a reminder to always be looking forward. It reminds us that our salvation is not just past tense, but there is a past, present and future aspect to our salvation. We are saved from the penalty of sin, saved from the power of sin, and saved from the presence of sin. This is past, present and future. Certainly if we trust Jesus with our eternal salvation, then we should be able to trust Jesus with everything, shouldn't we? I think we all understand talking about trusting Jesus is easier said than done.

This time of year you have flying reindeer and a one-horse open sleigh. It seems like a good time for a little horse illustration. Most of the riding that Patti and I do is just trail riding. It does not take a lot of sophistication to train for that compared to a lot of the other disciplines. One thing you do have to face is the reality that on any trail ride there is always the potential that your horse is going to encounter something he has never encountered before. In those moments that horse has to trust you to navigate him around or through whatever it is. And sometimes on the trail that can be in a relatively high-risk environment. So you want to train for that back home, in what is a much lower risk environment. You intentionally set the horse up to encounter things he has never encountered before. In a lower risk environment you teach him to trust you as you navigate around and through safely, in preparation for that day when the risk is much higher and he needs to trust you.

This raises the question: I wonder if God ever does that with us? Do you suppose God ever sets us up in situations that are relatively low risk so that we will learn what it means to trust Him, in order to prepare us for that experience where the risk will be much higher and we will need to trust Him? Turn with me to Mark chapter 6 and we will find an obvious answer to that question.

We have been working our way through the Gospel of Mark. In chapter 6, Jesus sent out the twelve, his leadership team, the apostles. We pick it up in verse 30 of chapter 6.

**The apostles gathered together with Jesus; and they reported to Him all that they had done and taught. And He said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while.” (For there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.) They went away in the boat to a secluded place by themselves.** (Mark 6:30-32, \*NASB)

This is just a note about the interpretation process here. It is very important when you go through the Gospels to realize you cannot take specific miracles, events, and teachings and pull them out to interpret them all by themselves. They all have to be understood within the flow of thought. What is it Mark is trying to say? This passage makes a good example of that.

In the first part of the chapter through verse 13, Jesus sends out His disciples. As soon as they go out, we might think that is the end of that discussion and Mark is going to go on to something else. He tells us about the faith of John the Baptist. What is interesting is that in

verse 30 Mark comes back to the discussion about the disciples being sent out. This would help us understand that the discussion about the fate of John the Baptist was an interruption of the story line. This tells us that the only way you can understand Mark's point about the fate of John the Baptist is to see it in the context of the story line. Why did he choose at that point to have this flashback and grab something from the past, interrupting the story as a parenthetical or an aside? As soon as Mark said Jesus sent out His disciples he wanted to take a step back and say, "Now understand, there is a great cost to following Jesus. Okay, now back to the story line."

In verse 30, we are picking up the story line and moving forward. It is also worth noting that in verse 30 Mark refers to the twelve as the apostles. This is the only time in Mark's Gospel where he refers to them that way. The apostles were the twelve; it was limited to those twelve. Sometimes it is hard to tell when the writer is referring to the "disciples" if he is referring to the many disciples of Jesus or specifically the twelve. In this particular text, I think he is limiting it to Jesus' leadership team, which is the twelve.

The apostles get back together and tell Jesus what they have done and what they have taught. He pulls them aside to rest and recover before they go on with their ministry. I do find it interesting as you read through the Gospels that as busy as Jesus was and as many demands as there were on His time, He had this rhythm that kept Him healthy. Jesus understood how to pull back and to rest and recover to maintain His health.

I remember growing up I used to hear these preachers say over and over again, "I would rather burn out than rust out." Even then, I found myself wondering, *Are those really the only two options?* The answer is no. As a matter of fact, I think both of those are displeasing to God. I do not think it impresses God when we burn out for Him. I think we need to understand there must be a rhythm to life that keeps us healthy, because when we are healthy we are at our best to accomplish what He has called us to. Jesus modeled that over and over. This text is just a good reminder. He pulled them aside; they needed to rest and recover. The problem in this particular story is that the only rest they are going to get is on the boat until they hit shore again.

**The people saw them going, and many recognized them and ran there together on foot from all the cities, and got there ahead of them. When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things.**

(vs. 33-34)

Jesus and the disciples get to the shore and they are hoping for a little R & R. Low and behold, there are well over 5,000 people waiting on the shore to meet them. As the people see the boat going across the sea, of course they are running on land. They keep going through cities and more and more people follow. By the time Jesus lands on the shore, there is a huge mob. The text says Jesus saw them and He was irritated with them. He said, "You people need to get a life. Go home!" Oh, wait a minute...that is what *I* would have said.

Jesus was tired, but it says He had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. I don't suppose many of us are sheep experts, but you have to understand these sheep in the first century were not in nicely fenced-off pastures, but they roamed in the wild. Sheep without a shepherd were a disaster. They were panicked and they did not know where to go for food and water. They were constantly in danger. Jesus looks at this crowd of people

and He says that is what they are like: “These people are so confused they are like sheep without a shepherd.” It says His heart was full of compassion for them.

That word for compassion is a very strong word. It means to be so moved on the inside that it compelled Him to take action on the outside. Sometimes we see situations and we would say, “You know, I feel sorry for them.” But that is not this word. This word goes well beyond that. It is to be so moved that we actually do something about it to help resolve the situation. Jesus takes the time for these people and He teaches them.

In typical Mark fashion, we are not told what He taught them. It is not relevant to Mark’s point here.

**When it was already quite late, His disciples came to Him and said, “This place is desolate and it is already quite late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.”**  
(vs. 35-36)

In order to really understand the point of this text, we do have to come to grips with the fact that the advice, the counsel, of the leadership team was very, very good. Imagine the leadership team gathering together while Jesus is doing His ministry. They are saying, “You know, there are over 5,000 people here. We are looking around and we are out in the sticks. We don’t see a fast-food restaurant anywhere. These people are going to get hungry and it is about dark. We need to tell Jesus to send these people home. They can go into the nearby cities and get some food, and we will all reconvene in the morning.” That is sound advice. That is very reasonable; it is very prudent. It is good leadership.

Therein lies the problem. This is Jesus’ leadership team. And what they have to learn, if they are going to accomplish the mission, is that you cannot always be bound by what is prudent, what is reasonable, what is explainable. You can’t always be bound by the abilities and resources you have. “You have to understand that when you are with Me, you have to trust Me and not limit your vision to what you can do”—that is the lesson Jesus needs to teach His leadership team.

I am convinced that the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 was not really about feeding 5,000 people. It was about training twelve people. Jesus set this up in order to teach them that they have to trust Him. They offered fine counsel. Jesus turns to them and He answered them.

**But He answered them, “You give them something to eat!”** (v. 37a)

Jesus is saying, “You do it!” The “you” there is emphatic, which just means that is the point: “You! You do it!” The disciples don’t respond well.

**And they said to Him, “Shall we go and spend two hundred denarii on bread and give them something to eat?”** (v. 37b)

I think there is a note of sarcasm in that. Two hundred denarii would be about eight months’ wages. I don’t think they are saying they have a bag of money and are asking if they should spend that much. I think they are saying, “What are we supposed to do? Pull up a million dollars out of the bag and go buy them something?” It is a sarcastic response meaning, “What are we supposed to do?”

**And He said to them, “How many loaves do you have?”** (v. 38a)

I love the way this is written. It sounds like the discussion I have occasionally with my children. You get the impression that Jesus says, “How many loaves do you have?” and they are kind of looking at each other thinking, *What is He talking about? Does He have a clue?* It is followed by: “Go look! Don’t just stand there and stare at Me. Go look! I am serious.”

**And when they found out, they said, “Five, and two fish.”** (v. 6:38b)

Jesus says to them, “How many loaves do you have? Go look!” So they go out and look and they come back: “Five, and two fish.” That is probably how it sounded. It is kind of like “Duh.”

These loaves were barley loaves, which were thin little flat pieces of bread. The two fish were like sardines. They were a relish that they would eat with their bread. Basically five loaves and two fish would have been a very small lunch for one person; it was not much. To really understand the point of this text, you have to process this a little bit. Do you suppose that one of the disciples sat down and said, “Okay, men, we’ve got five loaves and two fish. I have been doing the paperwork. If we divide them exactly this way and we mix in a little grass, it is going to be a stretch, but I think we can probably get everybody fed.” I don’t imagine that discussion took place. What Jesus was asking them to do was absolutely *impossible*.

It is interesting sometimes what we refer to as a step of faith. Oftentimes what we are saying is, “If I just try a little harder, if I just discipline myself, if I just stretch myself a little more, I think I can probably pull it off.” And we think of that as a step of faith. That is more like Avis Rent-a-Car’s motto: “We will just try harder.”

That is not what He is talking about here. This is looking at their abilities and their resources and saying, “No matter what we do, this is absolutely impossible.” Where there is no risk, there is no faith. That is the part of the faith walk we don’t like. We somehow want to be able to take the risk out of it. “If I can figure it out, if I just try harder, if I just do this and this. It is going to be hard, but I think I can probably pull it off.” That is not what the disciples were talking about. We are talking about a huge risk. All they have are five loaves and two fish. This cannot possibly feed the crowd.

I remember when our Board sat down and talked through where we believed God was leading us as a church. Last January in the State of the Church message we unveiled the three-year vision, which included building a youth complex, a 3,500 seat auditorium, hiving off several hundred people to plant a church in north Lincoln, planting 100 churches in India, and starting a one-year leadership college—all in the next three years. I remember those discussions. We sat down as a Board and said, “Let’s look at our resources. Let’s look at our abilities. It will be a stretch but yes, we can do that.” I don’t ever remember that discussion. What I remember are discussions filled with a lot of anxiety, a lot of fear and a lot of terror, saying to God, “You have got to be kidding! I mean, come on. There are 5,000 people here who need to be fed. We have only got one puny lunch. Can’t we do something else? Maybe just wallpaper a Sunday School class or something?”

Part of what has to sneak in is that this isn’t about our resources. This is not about our ability. It is just about obedience. Jesus says, “I want you to do this. What do you have?” “I’ve got five loaves and two fish.” He says, “Fine, give them to me.” That is the risk of faith.

**And He commanded them all to sit down by groups on the green grass. They sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed the food and broke the loaves and He kept giving them to the disciples to set before them; and He divided up the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up twelve full baskets of the broken pieces, and also of the fish. There were five thousand men who ate the loaves.** (vs. 39-44)

Jesus divides them into these groups of 50 and 100. As you read through the text, it is interesting that everything is going through the disciples, so I am convinced it is ultimately about *them*—about teaching and training them. Jesus begins to break the bread and the fish; the disciples distribute it. They just keep distributing it. The text says, “They all got a little bite.” No, that is not what it says. It says they all “were satisfied.” In other words, they all ate more than if one of them would have eaten the lunch themselves. They ate until they were satisfied.

Then each of the twelve goes around and with the leftovers fills up his basket. Jesus makes sure that they each have their own basket. The leftovers fill it up. He wants to make sure that none of them miss the point. They bring it back. They actually have way more when they are done than they had when they started.

It was typical in the first century that you counted crowds by the number of men in the crowd. But that does not include the women and children. Conservatively speaking, it would easily have been well over 7,500 people. This was a huge crowd that was fed with five loaves and two fish.

I would also say that this is a low-risk miracle. By that, I mean that if Jesus takes the loaves and fish and it doesn't quite work out and only three people get fed, what is the risk in that? Well, they all go home hungry and that is about it. It is a fairly low-risk miracle. But Jesus wanted them to learn from this. “In this environment, I want you to learn that with Me nothing is impossible. Do not ever limit yourselves to your ability and your resources. Just take what you have, give it to Me, and watch Me do My thing. Learn from that.” He wanted them to learn so that when they get in an environment where the risk is much higher, they will trust Him.

That is exactly what happens.

**Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side to Bethsaida, while He Himself was sending the crowd away. After bidding them farewell, He left for the mountain to pray.** (vs. 45-46)

There are two things here we don't want to miss. Mark says “immediately”—this is one of Mark's favorite words. This was not a week later. This was not a month later. This was a matter of *minutes* later.

When the text said he “made” them get on the boat this is a very strong Greek word. We would say he forced them onto the boat. In other words, Mark wants you to know that they were absolutely sure this was what Jesus wanted them to do. They did not get partway out and think, *I wonder if Jesus wanted us to leave?* He forced them in the boat. And He said, “I want you to go halfway across the Sea of Galilee and drown.” That is not what He said. “I want you to go to the other side. I will meet you there.” And He forced them off.

**When it was evening, the boat was in the middle of the sea, and He was alone on the land. Seeing them straining at the oars, for the wind was against them, at about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea; and He intended to pass by them. But when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed that it was a ghost, and cried out; for they all saw Him and were terrified. But immediately He spoke with them and said to them, “Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid.” Then He got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped; and they were utterly astonished. (vs. 47-51)**

It is about 3:00 in the morning and Jesus sees them out on the Sea of Galilee. The wind has come up and this has become a very dangerous situation. These were not amateurs in the boat; these were professional fishermen. They knew what they were doing. They understood they were in a very dangerous situation. This was not a low-risk situation. They could not just get out of the boat and say, “We are going to walk to shore.” This was do or die.

Jesus sees their situation and He walks to them. He intends just to walk by them. I think the plan is that they would see Jesus and they would be reminded, *Hey, what are we worried about? The man just fed 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish. He said He will meet us on the other side. Everything is going to be okay.* But that is not what happened. They kind of freaked out. Really, who can blame them? They see Jesus walking across the sea on the water and they think it is a ghost. They are losing it. Jesus says, “Hey, settle down. It is Me.” He gets in the boat and suddenly the wind stops and they are utterly astonished. We find ourselves thinking, *Hey, come on guys. Get a clue. How many times does He have to do this before you figure it out? This is God in the flesh. He can do anything.*

This whole discussion started in chapter 4 when Jesus calmed the sea in the middle of the storm and they asked the question, “Who is this man that even the wind and the sea obey him?” These chapters are answering that question. He is the God over demonic enemies when He healed the demoniac. This is the God who has power over disease. This is the God who has power over death. This is the God who can do anything. All you have to do is trust Him. Why were they not getting it?

We don’t have to guess at that. Mark tells us in verse 52:

**For they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was hardened.**

This reminds us that you have to take the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 together with the miracle of Jesus walking on the water. Mark intended for them to be interpreted together. One was supposed to prepare them for the other. The feeding of the 5,000 was intended that they might gain insight. In other words, He wanted them to learn to trust Him in a low-risk environment so they would be prepared to trust Him in a high-risk environment. But they hadn’t learned.

**When they had crossed over they came to land at Gennesaret, and moored to the shore. When they got out of the boat, immediately the people recognized Him, and ran about that whole country and began to carry here and there on their pallets those who were sick, to the place they heard He was. Wherever He entered villages, or cities, or countryside, they were laying the sick in the market places, and imploring Him that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak; and as many as touched it were being cured. (vs. 53-56)**

I think Mark puts that last paragraph in there to remind us that Jesus just kept doing miracle after miracle after miracle. This was probably in the number of hundreds of people coming out of these villages that were being healed.

Sometimes I hear people say that Jesus healed people in the Gospels because they had great faith. It is important to understand that the overwhelming majority of people who Jesus healed had very little knowledge of who He was. He did not heal them because of their great faith. He healed them because of His purpose. At this point, His purpose is to teach and train His leadership team what it means to trust Him. “Do not limit yourself to your abilities and your resources, but trust Me.”

We look at all that these disciples had experienced with Jesus and we understand the problem was that they were experiencing these miracles, but they were not learning from them. They were experiencing God’s faithfulness, but they were not learning from God’s faithfulness. They were not gaining insight. It begs the question: How much does Jesus have to do before they get it?

It also begs another question. We have the entire Old Testament. We have the full New Testament story. We have 2,000 years of God’s faithfulness in the Church. We have far more today than they had. So let’s ask ourselves the question: How much does Jesus have to do before we get it? It is not enough just to experience His faithfulness. It is not enough just to experience His miracles. We have to gain insight. We have to learn in order that we might trust Him.

What is there going on in your life today that is just too hard for Jesus? What is it that is so complicated you cannot trust Him? What are the big steps of faith that God is asking you to take? “Well, you know, I have looked at my abilities and I have looked at my resources. I have done everything on paper. I just don’t think this will work.” Where there is no risk there is no faith. Do not limit your vision to what you can explain, to what you can do on your own ability and resources.

For some of you, a big step of faith is going to come in the next several months. God is going to speak to your heart and ask you to become a part of the north church plant. You are going to say, “I don’t know if I want to go. That all sounds kind of risky, and I like it here.” I understand all that. Is there any risk with that? There is a lot of risk with that. I could name you a hundred things that can go wrong and it could all fall apart. Nobody is saying it is risk-free. But we believe in our hearts God has said to do this. This is not about Andy; this is not about Dick. This is about obedience to Jesus. I know God is going to speak to some of your hearts and He is going to say He wants you to go. It is going to be a big step of faith.

We certainly have some big steps of faith ahead of us as a body. In essence, I would say that the youth complex was like the feeding of the 5,000. It was a low-risk step of faith. It was a step of faith, but we also understood if the economy goes bad, if this happens or if that happens, we will somehow survive. Here we are less than a year later, and today the college ministry is meeting in the new building for their first week. Everything is paid for. God has said, “Just trust Me. I will take care of it.”

That is fairly low-risk compared to the next step, where the risk meter goes way up. It is very easy at this point to sit down and say, “Wait a minute. Let’s figure out our abilities. I am a little concerned about Pastor Clark; he is kind of nutty. Let’s think about our resources. Let’s do some work and figure all this out. Boy, I just don’t think it is going to work.”

This is not about having the ability or the resources. It is about one thing. It is about *obedience*. We believe with all of our hearts that God has said to do this. And we say, “But Lord, what about this and this and this?” And He says, “What do you have? Go look!” “Well we have looked. We have five loaves and two fish.” “That’s fine. Give them to Me and watch Me multiple that in ways you cannot imagine.”

You see, this is not just about building a building. If that is all God cared about, He could drop ten million dollars out of the sky and we would all say, “Oh, that is great! It took all of the risk out of it for us.” But that is not what this is about. God is much more concerned about growing our faith than about building a building. When we corporately take big steps of faith, we together learn that God can take our loaves and our fish and multiple them and do things we never could have imagined. And if you learn from that, your faith will be strengthened, so that when the bottom falls out of your world you are ready. You will be ready to trust Him in a high-risk situation.

My prayer for our body is that our vision would never be limited to our abilities and resources—that it would never be limited by what we can explain, chart, plan and calculate. Our vision should always be driven by our obedience to do whatever God has called us to do. We offer Him our five loaves and our two fish, and we trust Him to do the rest. May that always be so.

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**Study Questions**  
*The Good News About Jesus According to Mark*  
**To Know Him Is To Trust Him**  
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**Opening Discussion**

1. What do you think of when you think about taking big steps of faith?  
  
What would be an example of a step of faith you've taken?
2. How does God prepare us to take big steps of faith?
3. What do you think is the key to trusting Jesus? In other words, what will determine whether or not you take big steps of faith?
4. Do you agree with the following statement: *Where there is no risk there is no faith?* Why or why not?

**Bible Study**

1. Read Mark 6:30-32. How important is it to pull away and rest from the demands of people in our lives?  
  
How do you do this?
2. Read Mark 6:33-44. Why did Jesus say to the disciples, "You give them something to eat"? What was He trying to teach them?
3. Jesus appears to have done this miracle to teach His disciples a lesson they needed to learn. What was that lesson?
4. Do you think Jesus sometimes purposely puts you in situations that you cannot resolve so that you will learn to trust Him? Share one of these with your group.
5. Read Mark 6:45-52. Did Jesus set His disciples up for another lesson in faith?  
  
Why did they respond as they did when they saw Jesus walking on the water?
6. Mark's comment in Mark 6:52 makes it clear that Mark wanted the story of the feeding of the 5,000 to be studied with the story of Jesus walking on the water. How was the first miracle meant to prepare them for the second?

7. Can you think of a time when God put you in a situation where you had to trust Him? What did you learn from that experience?

In what way did that prepare you for yet a bigger step of faith God might ask you to take?

8. Why is it important to learn and grow in our faith each time God demonstrates His power and faithfulness?
9. Read Mark 6:53-56. Is there anything in your life that is too big for Jesus? Is there anything He can't do? Is there any reason why you wouldn't trust Him to be faithful?

## **Application**

1. In what ways has God been faithful to you in the past? Has He given you any reason not to trust Him? Does Jesus lack the power to address your situation?
2. What big step of faith is God asking you to take?
3. What have you learned in the past that will help you to take this big step of faith tomorrow?
4. Pray for one another that God would teach each of us what it means to trust Him so that we are willing to take big steps of faith.