



The Loaves
Mark 6.30-56
Ken Lippold
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I don't know about you, but most of the time, I feel pretty in control of my life. I choose where to go and when to go. It's up to me when I can leave my house and where I can go and for how long. I choose what to buy and when to buy it and even how much I want to buy of something.

But that's all changed...And it pretty much happened overnight.

It feels like we've all lost quite a bit of control over our own lives. For almost all of us, what we're living through right now is a drastic change to our lives. School cancelled, offices closed, borders shut, hospitals soon to be overloaded...

The plus side is, I don't have to conform anymore to society's norm that I take a shower every day...although, I guess I do have to conform to my wife's wishes on that...well... we'll see how it goes.

In a way, this is what today's passage is about. We meet a couple of groups of people who want to have control.

They both have something they want Jesus to do for them.

And what we have today is a passage about eating. Everyone we meet in this passage is hungry.

But just below the surface, this passage is about another hunger. A deeper hunger—not merely a physical hunger but an existential hunger. It's about the hunger we all feel when we don't have control. When we feel like we're out of control, or under someone else's control.

This passage is an answer to that. And Mark, the writer tells us this story to show us what happens when we stop trying to be in control and instead we give ultimate control over to Jesus Christ—the true author of creation.

So, to recap here's the story, And I'm going to tell you the entire story in a sentence, Are you ready? Here's the whole story in a sentence:

Jesus brings a new kind of kingdom, with a compassionate shepherd for a king, totally inadequate followers...and...bread?!?

And when we understand this story, when we really wrap our minds and hearts around this story, we'll know why we can give up control, and not only be ok, but be better off.

Let's try and understand it together.

text: Mark 6.30-31 - **30** The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. **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."

Mark sets the scene for us in verses 30-32. You see, Jesus had sent out, for the first time, his 12 followers—the 12 apostles to the surrounding towns and villages to spread the word about Jesus.

And in verse 30 they've come back and they're reporting to him what happened on their journeys. But notice in verse 31—they can't even do that, because the crowds are still coming to Jesus—he can't seem to get away, and notice this because it's important, verse 31...

text: Mark 6.30-31 - 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."

The disciples are hungry—they haven't eaten. You know the best part of gathering with the church online? Eating during the sermon. I'm curious how many of you are eating right now? At least three of you just got up and are heading to the kitchen right now!

Well, **you** might be eating, but Jesus and the disciples haven't.

So, what do they do? Verse 32...

text: Mark 6.32 - So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.

All they want is some rest and something to eat. But when they get to the other side of the lake, there's no rest and there's no food...only the crowds and no one seems to have brought anything to eat.

This is the worst picnic ever!

Ok, so that's the scene, a bunch of hungry people in a remote place...and now the story really begins:

1. Jesus Brings a New Kind of Kingdom...

Now, what does a picnic in the wilderness have to do with a kingdom? Well, I'll tell you.

First, we need to look at what came just before this in Mark, and then second, we'll need to look a little bit at the historical context.

A. Literary Context

First, let's look at the story that came just before this in Mark. Do you remember what it is? It's the story of John the Baptist getting his head cut off by King Herod. Remember this? King Herod is a person who has a lot of control.

He throws himself a birthday party and it's a killer party. You have to imagine, the food is plentiful, and the wine is flowing, people are eating and drinking. And there's dancing and there's an execution. Like I said, killer party.

Now, that story gives us a picture of a king who not only has control but he uses his control for self-promotion and self-preservation.

So, that's the old kingdom, one of self-promotion and self-preservation. But Jesus comes to bring a new kind of kingdom...and he reveals more of his new kingdom at this picnic in the wilderness.

B. Historical Context

So, that's what came before. Now, here's the historical context.

Why are all these people there? It's the middle of nowhere! And it's a lot of people. When Mark

says 5000 men, it probably means, heads of families, which means there could be close to 15 or 20 thousand there.

Why were they there? Why are **all** these people out in the middle of nowhere to see Jesus?

Up to now, the crowds came to be healed. But this crowd is different. They're here for something else.

And what Mark only hints at, the Apostle John makes explicit in John chapter 6.15. Take a look...John is telling the very same story, the feeding of the 5000.

text: John 6.15b - ...they intended to come and make him king by force...

You see, when Jesus comes on the scene, the Jews were fed up with foreign control by kings like King Herod. They want their own king.

The crowds are there because they want a new king and they want to make Jesus their king.

And isn't that exactly what each of us want? A king? Well, you might not think so, but deep down, each of us really does want a king. And who's the king we want?

Me. I want to be king...You want to be king. We each want to be king of our own kingdom. We each want to live in a kingdom where what we say goes—where we have control. Our own kingdom of self-promotion and self-preservation.

This crowd wanted Jesus to be king, and they wanted to be king makers. Now, they lived in a much more communal society than we do today. In their culture, the only way to make your life better was if there was a good king, a good ruler who looked out for you.

But that's now how we think today. Today, everyone can be the ruler of their own life, the ruler of their own kingdom. Everyone wants control—the ability to do whatever you feel like whenever you feel like it.

But for a time, who knows how long? We've lost it. So how do we find the sturdiness to live in this kind of a situation? How do we find the strength, the ability to endure an indefinite loss of control?

Well, that's the next part of the story, because in the next part of the story we find a compassionate shepherd for a king. That's our second point. First, Jesus brings a new kind of kingdom...secondly...

2. With a Compassionate Shepherd for a King...

The crowds want a new king, but they want him to come in power, and to use his power to overthrow the current king. They want to swap one authoritarian for another.

But look at Jesus...look at how he sees them. We know how they see him, but look at how he sees them, he sees them as a sheep without a shepherd. Verse 34...

text: Mark 6.34a - When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

illustration: Now, where I grew up, we don't have a lot of sheep, but I've lived in England long enough, and visited Wales enough times now, that I've seen some sheep—a lot of sheep. And I've seen how much trouble they can get into without someone looking after them. I've seen them stand in the middle of a busy highway. Last year on the church weekend away, I helped one get its head unstuck from a fence. I think it stuck its head through the fence to eat some grass on the other side...there was grass on both sides. I guess it's not always greener. Without a shepherd, sheep get in trouble.

That's the image here, the crowd are like sheep without a shepherd. Sheep who don't know what to do, where to go, they're lost, they're afraid, they're unprotected. In fact, they don't have much control at all.

And here is Jesus Christ, who we've seen all through the book of Mark as the one who has control over everything. The one who has so

much control all he needs is a touch and sickness is gone. All he needs is a word—a single word—and the storm is calmed.

Well, he sees this crowd and he's filled with compassion for them. He sees them as sheep without a shepherd.

Now, remember what the crowd wants, they want a political leader. They want a new authoritarian to come and take back control of their land. That's why they're out here in the wilderness.

They want Jesus to come and start the revolution. They want him to hand out weapons, swords, spears, bows and arrow—firepower!

But look at this! Notice this, look again at the entirety of verse 34, what does he give them, swords, spears...

text: Mark 6.34 - 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.*

No, Jesus gives them his Word, he gives them his teaching. And not only that, but we'll see in just a minute...he's also going to give them bread.

Why bread? Well, there's all kinds of reasons that we don't have time to look at together, but one reason is because of what bread symbolises. Now when you and I look at bread, do you know what it means? Lunch.

Well, the longer this pandemic goes on, it might mean more to us than that.

But in the ancient world that Jesus is living in, it does mean more than lunch. To them, bread means life. They lived in a subsistence culture, you didn't always know where your next meal was going to come from—so to them bread means life.

So, what is Jesus offering to these sheep without a shepherd? These people who want

control?... He offers his word and he offers bread.

Why? What's he doing? What's he saying?

He's saying, "I didn't come to take control by force—by power. In fact, I didn't come to **take** control at all. I came to give it up.

Because what's his word? What's he teaching?...It's the gospel...The news that he came to serve, not to be served...that he came to cleanse—to be a cleaner, he came to forgive sins.....he came to give up his life...he came to die.

That's the word—the teaching. And he also gave them bread. Why bread?

Well, in satisfying their physical hunger, he's trying to show them, you actually have a deeper hunger. A hunger that bread itself, literal bread can't fill. And if you don't get that emptiness filled by me—he says—you're going to starve forever.

And listen, you'll always feel out of control unless you deal with this hunger.

Well, we'll see more about the bread in a minute, but for now, if there is anything you need to know about Jesus Christ, is not only that he is God in the flesh—co-equal with God the Father and God the Spirit.

But what you really need to know about him is that even though he is fully God—meaning he has all control—control over everything—he didn't come to take control. He came to give it up. To lay it down for the sake of others. He didn't come to fill himself up, he came to fill—to satisfy—our true hunger.

So, to this crowd that is starving for control, hungering after it, thirsting after it. He gives them the Word and he gives them bread.

So, you feel like you lost control this week? Like the ability to direct your coming and your going, what you buy, what you eat, when your kids are home, when they're not? You feel like you lost that this week?

Well, Jesus Christ didn't just lose control of his life, in fact no one could ever take it from him. He didn't lose it, he gave it up. He gave it up for you. And that means he's the kind of person worth following. He's the kind of person worth trusting when your control is taken.

Because **he** gets it. In fact he gets it better than you or I ever will. And that means we can trust him today. He's big enough to handle all the anxiety you're feeling at the moment.

Do you get that? Well, if that's hard for you, don't worry, even his closest followers didn't get it. That's the next part of the story.

3. Totally Inadequate Followers...

Jesus brings a new kind of kingdom, with a compassionate shepherd for a king, totally inadequate followers...

So, remember the scene? Maybe fifteen thousand hungry people out in the wilderness and no one brought a Snickers. Well, look what happens, look what Jesus' closest followers say, verse 35—it's a remote place, it's late in the day...verse 36, send them away so **they** can find something to eat.

I love this story, because this is exactly how I think. I'm just like them. I see there's a problem, and immediately come up with a solution.

illustration: How many times have I done this at home with Emmy. She's facing something difficult at work or with a friend; and she tells me all about it, and often before she's even finished telling me the problem, I interrupt and say: "Ok, here's what you should do." But she didn't want a solution, all she wanted was for me to listen. And here I am trying to write her story, to write her narrative.

I'm just like them. Maybe you are too...

Here's Jesus' followers, again, trying to take control of the situation. They're trying to write the narrative. But they've forgotten, they're not the author of the story, Jesus is.

So, Jesus writes the story in a different way, take a look. The disciples say: "Jesus send the crowds away..." Verse 37...

text: Mark 6.37a - **37** But he answered, "You give them something to eat."

He gives them an impossible demand. Something they could never have enough control to make happen. A task they're totally inadequate for.

There's only 12 of them and a crowd of fifteen thousand. To feed that many people it would cost half a year's salary, they say.

So, Jesus has them gather up what they can: five loaves of bread and two fish.

Then he sits the crowd down and then the miracle happens. The author of creation steps up and does something spectacular!

He breaks a loaf of bread in half. I mean, this is not the dining hall at Hogwarts—this is a few loaves of bread. And yet, and yet, notice what it says...verse 40...

text: Mark 6.40b-43 - ...he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. **42** They all ate and were satisfied, **43** and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish.

Do you see, when the disciples want control, when they want to write the story, everyone leaves hungry. Everyone leaves with their stomach empty. But when Jesus writes the story, not only does everyone leave full, but there's leftovers.

Here's what Mark wants to show us. Jesus Christ can satisfy any hunger. But he doesn't want to satisfy it with just anything or anyone. He wants to satisfy it with himself.

Are you lonely? Do you want control? Do you have ambition. Look, you can try, like the crowds to fill those hungers with a boyfriend or a girlfriend or a spouse or children. You can try and fill it by running for success and power and money. You can try and fill your hunger with pleasure.

But in the end, unless you get that hunger filled by Jesus Christ, you'll never be satisfied. Nothing will ever be enough, you'll always want more. Unless you let Jesus fill you up, then there's not only enough for you, but there's leftovers.

Do you get that? Well, if that's hard for you, don't worry, even his closest followers didn't get it. Even after this incredible miracle, they didn't get it, because look at the last part of the story—part 4...

4. ...And...Bread?

Jesus brings a new kind of kingdom, with a compassionate shepherd for a king, totally inadequate followers...and...bread?!?!

There's so much here to talk about. I'm like a kid in a candy store with this passage, but I'm gonna stay disciplined for you and only pull out the choicest pieces.

Here's how the story continues. Jesus sends his 12 followers back to the boat while he goes up the mountain to pray. And in the middle of the night, while Jesus is back on land, the disciples are struggling in the boat against the wind.

But then, look at this, I love this...

text: Mark 6.48b - Shortly before dawn he went out to them, walking on the lake. *He was about to pass by them...*

At this point in Mark, it's not the walking on the lake that surprises me! We've seen him heal a leper, cast out demons, calm a storm, forgive sins and we just saw him feed 15,000 people—and he did it all with a touch of his hand or a word from his mouth.

Walking on water is nothing for this man! The detail that I love is that it says he was about to pass by them. As if he was just out for a stroll and, "evening gentlemen".

It's so effortless, so nonchalant.

That is a picture of someone who is **truly** in control. There is not a hint of anxiety in him. But the disciples, the people who just a few lines ago were trying to assert their control

over Jesus have found themselves in a situation where they have no control—they can't beat the wind, they can't beat the waves and now they think they've seen a ghost. And what do they do? They panic.

But look at Jesus, verse 50...

text: Mark 6.50b - Immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

Ok, now, here's the choicest morsel from the passage. The best piece of candy on the shelf, verse 51. Take a look...

When Jesus gets in the boat, the storm is over, and they're amazed—and here's the choice morsel—why are they amazed, verse 52—***for they had not understood about the loaves***; their hearts were hardened.

Listen, if you're having a hard time accepting this, if you're finding it difficult to believe or understand how Jesus Christ can satisfy your desire for control, how he can fill your deepest longing, you're not alone. Even the 12 people who knew him best, the 12 people who followed him everywhere for 3 years had a hard time.

It says here they didn't understand about the loaves. Do you understand? We should read this story and get to this point and think. Wait, if they didn't understand about the loaves, do I? Do I understand about the loaves?

What is it about the loaves we need to understand if we want our anxiety to go away? What is it about the loaves we need to understand if we want our hunger satisfied? Our need for control to be laid down?

Let's go back and look at it again in more detail, because I think we passed over something, that on the surface seemed so ordinary, so mundane, I think we might have missed the deeper point about the loaves just like the disciples in the boat. Let's go back, verse 41...

text: Mark 6.41 - Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves.

Notice what Jesus did with the bread—he gave thanks and he broke—you could translate it as "He blessed and he broke".

Now, why is this important? Why is it important that he blessed and he broke the bread. Well, it's foreshadowing.

Because in Mark chapter 14, Jesus picks up bread again. Only this time, it's in the upper room, it's at the last supper. And there, in Mark 14, Jesus picks up the bread, and it says the exact same thing as in chapter 6: he blessed and he broke. And then he says—about the bread...

text: Mark 14.22 - "Take it; this is my body."

What's he talking about? How is the bread his body? Well, the bread is a picture of his body—it's an illustration of what's going to happen to his body, because guess what happens at the end of his life?

When he's hanging on the cross, when he's looking at the people killing him, his enemies, the people snatching control from him, he does something remarkable.

He says, "Father forgive them." And then he died. In other words, he blessed and he broke.

Don't you see? Jesus Christ is the bread! Do you understand now about the bread? Jesus Christ is the bread—he is the one who is broken for you. And his brokenness is your blessing. How? How is his brokenness our blessing?

If you see a loaf of bread, if it stays whole, I can't eat it right? And if I can't eat I die—I decay, I'm broken—I literally go to pieces.

But if I'm to be whole and eat the bread is broken, it has to be broken into pieces. You see. It's me or the bread!

Either you're pieces or I'm pieces.

But Jesus Christ said, I am the bread. And what he meant by that is, I was torn to pieces so you can be whole. I went to the cross and I took the punishment that humankind deserved. I absorbed your punishment for every wrong you've ever done.

I took punishment so you can be forgiven. I soaked up the wrath so you could receive mercy. I was broken so you can be whole.

Do you see it now? His brokenness is our wholeness. Don't you see? We don't become

whole, We don't have our deepest existential hunger filled by seizing control. We do it by giving it up.

And it's only when we understand that, only when we accept that, that we can truly give up the need—the hunger—for control. You see, Christians have a capacity for living in a time like this unlike anyone else, because we have a savior unlike anyone else.

We have a savior who, instead of taking control, he gave it up. We have a savior who broke—who chose to break—first as our substitute and second as our example.

Why would **you** be willing to give up control in a time like this? Because of the bread—the bread that was broken for you.

Why should you be willing to give up control and stay in your home for these next few weeks? Those of you who are doctors and nurses and, why should you be willing to give up control over your schedule over these next few weeks? Parents with kids at home 24/7? Those of you who are single and living alone? Those of you with roommates?

Why should you be willing to give up control over these next few weeks?

Because of the bread—Jesus Christ who blessed and broke **for** you.

So let's look to him as we're stuck in our houses, as we lose our patience with our spouses and children, as we feel lonely and on our own, as we miss going for a coffee, as we lose the control to come and go as we please.

Understand the bread—receive the bread. Because if you do, you can find the strength to live in these uncertain times.

If we were in the same room right now, I'd be giving you this bread as a picture of this deep truth about Jesus. So, at some point today, I want you to have some bread, I want you to eat it in remembrance of him who was broken for you.