

July 19, 2015 – Mark 6:30-44 (OT: Jeremiah 23:1-6 Epistle: Ephesians 2:11-22)

Jesus Compassionately and Abundantly Supplies All Your Needs.

You probably have seen the image called Rubin's vase.¹ It is a drawing of vase or you may see instead the silhouette of two faces looking at each other. There is another well-known optical illusion in which you see either a young woman looking away from you or the profile of an old woman.² What you see in these pictures depends on your focus, and what you see can change as you study the image.

Our Gospel reading today is a little like these two pictures. At first glance, we may think that we know what it is all about, but when we focus on the details we can see something different. When you read Mark 6:30-44, what did you think it was about? It is the well-known account of Jesus feeding the five thousand. Most of our Bibles today put a heading over this section that says something to that effect. But there is more to see here than Jesus feeding all these men with five loaves of bread and two fish. When we look more closely, we see that Jesus provides more than food; we see that He compassionately and abundantly supplies all our needs.

Food is a major theme in these verses. Jesus miraculously feeds the five thousand (and that was no optical illusion), but before that we see in verse 31 that so many people were coming to see Jesus and going that Jesus and the disciples "*did not even have time to eat.*" So Jesus proposed they go to the other side of the lake and "*so they departed to a deserted place in the boat by themselves*" (v. 32).

But Jesus' concern was not just finding some peace and quiet so that they could eat. The disciples had just returned from the mission trip He had sent them on in the beginning of this chapter (see Mark 6:7-12). It had been a taxing journey, so Jesus said to them, "*Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while*" (v. 31). Jesus knew His disciples needed time to rest and recover from their work.

The same is true for us; we need rest and God knows that. But with all the things we have to do we often feel guilty when we aren't doing something. Evidently this problem isn't limited to our day and age, as God had to make rest one of the commandments. The third commandment says: "*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates*" (Exodus 20:8-10).

The Israelites had a lot of difficulty with this commandment, they either ignored it or followed it legalistically, coming up with over 200 things that one could not do on the Sabbath. But Jesus explained that God set up the Sabbath for our benefit. The Sabbath was made for us, not we for the Sabbath, that is, so that we must follow a list of things that one shouldn't do on that day (see Mark 2:27). Through the third commandment Jesus says to you: "*Come aside by yourselves ... and rest a while.*" It is meant to give us needed rest, and, as Luther explained, the opportunity to hear and learn God's word.

Which points us to the next thing that we see in this account. Jesus and the disciples did not get much time alone. The people saw them leave and knew where they were going and ran there on

1. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rubin_vase

2. See <http://mathworld.wolfram.com/YoungGirl-OldWomanIllusion.html>

foot. When Jesus saw the great multitude, He *“was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd”* (v. 34). So what did He do? He doesn’t feed them at this point, but *“He began to teach them many things”* (v. 34). What they needed most was to hear God’s word. They needed to hear about the kingdom of God (see Luke 9:11) and that Jesus is the good shepherd who brings us into God’s kingdom.

Jesus saw that the people *“were like sheep not having a shepherd.”* Without a shepherd, sheep are lost. They stray and have no one to protect them. That describes all of us without Jesus. As God said through the prophet Isaiah: *“All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way”* (Isaiah 53:6). We all have strayed outside of God’s kingdom and have sinned against God by disobeying His commandments.

But Jesus came as the Good Shepherd to lay down His life for His sheep. He took your sins upon Himself, as that verse in Isaiah goes on to say: *“...And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all”* (Isaiah 53:6). It is only through Jesus’ death on the cross to take away your sins that you can enter the kingdom of God. And Jesus rose again from the dead so that He now lives forever to be our shepherd. No longer are we sheep without a shepherd.

After spending the day hearing the word of God from the Word made flesh, the disciples came and told Jesus to send the people away before it gets too dark so *“that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy themselves bread”* (v. 36). Remember that this was a desolate place. There were no markets or food vendors nearby, and we are told the people had nothing to eat. They had not brought any food with them.

But still Jesus did not feed them. Instead He told His disciples, *“You give them something to eat”* (v. 37). If you were in the sandals of the disciples and Jesus said that to you, what would your response be?

We have their response recorded for us here: *“Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give them something to eat?”* (v. 37). This doesn’t mean that the disciples had two hundred denarii on them, but it was a big number that they came up with. A denarius was a day’s wage. Using minimum wage (currently \$8.15/hour in Michigan) and 8 hours a day, that comes out to just over \$13,000. In the Gospel of John we are told that Phillip (one of the disciples) didn’t think that even this large sum would be enough for every one to have even just a little bit of food (John 6:7).

From their response, what does it seem that the disciples saw when they looked at Jesus? Would you say that they saw their God and Savior? Or the man who was their rabbi (their teacher)? Jesus had just sent them out with authority to cast out demons, heal the sick, and call people to repent and turn to the Savior. They had just come back from that mission and before the boat trip they told Jesus *“all things, both what they had done and what they had taught”* (v. 30). (Here again we have another reference to teaching in this text). The power and authority that Jesus had given them should have been fresh in their minds, but when Jesus told them to feed the five thousand they looked at the inadequacy of their pocketbooks and impossibility of the task.

But Jesus did not get angry or criticize them. Instead He asked, *“How many loaves do you have? Go and see”* and they went and found out that a boy had five loaves and two fish that they could use (v. 38). When we read this, we shouldn’t think of the loaves of bread that we buy today that can serve a number of people, but they were smaller loaves of flat bread that would serve one person, or maybe two. This amount of food would not go very far with so many.

But Jesus told them to have the crowd sit down in groups of 50s and 100s (which made it easy for the disciples to count exactly how many people they fed!). Jesus took the fives loaves and

two fish and blessed them and broke them and gave them to His disciples to feed the people. In doing this, Jesus wasn't doing anything special. He was serving the bread in the ordinary way but with extraordinary results. *"They all ate and were filled"* (v. 42).

Last week we heard that God the Father *"has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ"* (Ephesian 1:3). He does not hold back, but gives us every spiritual blessing in Christ – everything that we need for our salvation. He gave His own Son to die for us so that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have ever-lasting life.

Here we see that when God blesses us with earthly blessings He does hold back either. Jesus multiplied the food so that *"all ate and were filled"* and then there was enough left over to fill twelve baskets, one for each disciple – the same disciples didn't know where they were going to get enough bread to feed all these people and who probably had not had a chance to eat themselves. But Jesus showed His abundant compassion for the crowd who came to Him – and for His disciples – by teaching them and by meeting their earthly need for food.

Jesus does not spell out the lesson He was trying to teach His disciples here, but He does not need to. In asking them feed these thousands of people, He was calling them to turn to Him as the solution to the problem. Even though they had seen Jesus cast out demons and heal the sick and heard Him preach all day, they were still stumped when He ask them to feed all these people (see John 6:5-9).

But are we not often like Jesus' disciples here? When we face a difficult situation, even one that seems impossible, don't we often have trouble seeing past the problem to the one who has the solution: our Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ? As His disciples, Jesus uses the difficulties in our lives to teach us to turn to Him for help, rather than simply trying to rely on ourselves and our own resources. He wants us to see the compassion He has for us, His wandering sheep, and the abundant supply of grace, mercy, peace and forgiveness that only He can provide.

As we have talked about this account, were you reminded at all of Psalm 23? There a number of echoes of this well-known psalm in these verses. The Lord Jesus saw that the people were like sheep with out a shepherd, so He stepped in to be their shepherd. He miraculously and abundantly feed them, both with His word and with the bread and fish, so that they should not want. He made them sit on the green grass and so recline in the green pasture. And He set a table for them in this deserted place in the presence of the enemies sin and death. It was not only an earthy feast of fish and bread, but a feast of the good news that He has defeated sin and death by His perfect life, innocent death, and resurrection from the dead.

As we focus on this familiar account of Jesus feeding the five thousand, we see so much more than Jesus miraculously feeding this great number of people. We see that He came to be your Good Shepherd, to lead you and teach you that He compassionately and abundantly meets all of your needs – not only your needs here on earth, but most importantly your need for a Shepherd to save you from your straying and to bring you to the heavenly pasture He has prepared for you. May you always turn to Jesus and His word to supply all your needs.

Rock of Ages Evangelical Lutheran Church

www.GrandRapidsLutheran.org

Pastor Peter T. Evensen

616-322-9167 (cell) – peterevensen@icloud.com