

GAME CHANGER

SNUB SCARCITY

Mark 6:30-44

June 1-2, 2019 —Pastor Mark Toone—Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

This is week two of a series called “Game Changers.” We are learning as Jesus triumphs over common challenges in life that often paralyze us. Last week we watched Jesus Reject Rejection. This week he will “Snub Scarcity.”

Jesus performed something like 37 miracles during his earthly ministry. Aside from his resurrection—the granddaddy of all miracles—would it surprise you to discover that only ONE miracle appears in all four gospels? Which one? The healing of the man at the Pool of Bethesda? Nope. Only in John. The healing of the Ten Lepers? Nope, only in Luke. The raising of Jairus’ daughter? Nope, only Mark and Luke. The only miracle that appears in all four gospels is the one we will look at today: the miraculous feeding of the 5000. Let’s listen as Jesus teaches his disciples...and us...to “snub scarcity.”

To set the stage, the disciples have returned from their first mission. Jesus sent them out to preach, heal and cast out spirits. They are exhilarated but exhausted and Jesus decides they need a retreat. So they jump in Peter’s boat to sneak away to a quiet spot on the lake. But the crowds spot them and start running along the shore to catch them. I’ll bet the disciples were miffed. “Come on, can’t we get ONE day off?” But Jesus sees the crowds, has compassion on them because they were like “sheep without a shepherd,” orders the boat ashore and begins to teach. Here’s what happens next. 6:35-44.

And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, “This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.” But he answered them, “You give them something to eat.” And they said to him, “Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?” And he said to them, “How many loaves do you have? Go and see.” And when they had found out, they said, “Five, and two fish.”

Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all. And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men.

This is quite a contrast to last week’s story of Jesus’ rejection in his home town. The people of Nazareth mocked Jesus; they wanted nothing to do with him. But here, the crowds can’t get enough. Jesus and his exhausted disciples can’t even sneak away for a respite! A crowd of thousands basically stalks Jesus until he relents, puts ashore and begins to teach them. And in their amazement, they lose track of time.

Cyndi and I are moving into a new season of life together: we are vegetable gardeners! With the advice of Mr. Google and lots of friends, we have transformed a weed-infested section of our backyard into what I hope will be a paradise of tomatoes, radishes, cucumbers, lettuce...and whatever else Peter Rabbit doesn't steal from us. We are going to partner the Lord to create something good to eat...just like this story.

Problem is, I have months to wait before I can sink my teeth into a vine-ripened tomato! I remember our vegetable garden when I was a kid. I was so eager to eat something from our crop that I used to come home after school, go out and dig up one of the carrots to see how it was doing. Then I buried it again. That carrot didn't do too well! I hope I can show a little more patience this time.

The disciples were decidedly impatient because THEY knew this crowd was getting hungry. And this sets up a confrontation with Jesus where we discover three things about the disciples ...and about ourselves. They were 1-Inclined to Shirk; 2-Inclined to Calculate and 3- Inclined to Forget. The verbal sparring match begins when...and I always love when this happen...**the disciples tell Jesus what to do.** They say,

“This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.”

It made sense! There were probably 20,000 people, including families, in the middle of nowhere. No MacDonalds...MacDavids anywhere sight. It's getting late. The disciples had a reasonable concern: how do you feed this horde of hungry people?

But don't you just love their tone of voice? It's not, **“Lord, perhaps you should...”** or **“Lord, what would you think if...”**...or **“Lord...what shall we do?”** No, the exhausted disciples order Jesus to: **“SEND THEM AWAY...”** **We might be dismayed at their impertinence...** except ... we do the same thing, don't we? How often do YOU boss Jesus around... tell him what to do... get huffy with him when he doesn't come through for you....instead of trusting and listening and obeying what he says?

This moment with this crowd is a wonderful training opportunity, a chance to meet the needs of thousands who pursued Jesus half way around the lake to hear him teach. But when faced with this opportunity, the disciples are Inclined to Shirk. ...shirk their responsibility. Push it off on Jesus... push it off on the people. (Send them away Jesus...let them go buy their own danged food!) Rather than ask, “Lord, how can I meet this need?”

How many of us are inclined to shirk our Christian responsibility? Be honest; answer this question for yourself: **If everyone in this room were as faithful to the mission of Jesus as you... would it succeed?** If everyone else served as faithfully as you...if everyone else volunteered as eagerly as you...if everyone else gave as generously as you give...what would be the state of our mission? When **you** hear of an opportunity for

service, are you quick to sign up? When you hear of a financial need, are you quick to write the check? Or do you **pass by** the registration table...**pass on** the offering plate...**pass up** the opportunity to serve, **assuming someone else will carry your share of the load**? The disciples were shirkers in this moment. How about you?

If this question irritates you...you might want to pay attention! It could be the prompting of the Spirit and not just the meddling of Mark. Every person in this church has been designed and assigned. Designed by God with certain gifts and assigned a certain role in the work of the Church. If your response is anything other than a “Aye-aye, Lord” when he calls you to do your part, **you are shirking your responsibility**. Doing what the disciples did. Pushing your service on someone else. Washing your hands of it. And Jesus’ response is, “Don’t shirk! This is YOUR job. Your church. Your mission. This is what I’ve called YOU to do. Don’t shove it off on someone else. Get to work. **YOU give them something to eat.**”

Their first inclination was to shirk responsibility. Their second inclination was to calculate. (Inclined to Calculate); to figure out how much it would cost them. **“Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?”** Two hundred denarii were a year’s wages. Their knee jerk response was, “We can’t afford this.” **This is often WHY we shirk God’s call**. We fear how much it will cost, how much time it will take, how much energy it will require...so we hoard those resources to ourselves as if they will never be replenished. **We approach life, ministry, kingdom opportunities from a scarcity mentality.**

Jesus response is: “How many loaves DO you have? Go and see?” Don’t tell me what you DON’T have. DON’T focus on your scarcity. Tell me what you DO have! Go... look... explore...find hidden resources... **and watch what I can do with them.**”

So, they do...and return with five loaves and two fish. **Come on!** What is that with thousands to feed? **Well...it is all Jesus needs.** He commands all the people to sit down. Then lifts his eyes to heaven, blesses, breaks and gives it to the disciples to distribute. I’ve tried to imagine how that worked. Every time they broke off a chunk, did the remaining bit grow? Did the people participate in that miracle? Was Jesus training them, too? However it worked, we read that “...all ate and were satisfied!” Not just tided over. Satisfied! Filled! Imagine THIS much bread (hold loaf) being MORE than enough for all of you....times 30!

The central lesson of this story is, never minimize your gifts! When we offer to Christ what little we have...he multiplies it miraculously. **There is never scarcity in the hands of the one who created all things...and gives us everything.**

So the disciples were inclined to shirk...inclined to calculate...and finally, Inclined to Forget. Think about it: by this time, they have watched Jesus heal people, calm the sea, cast out spirits and raise someone from the dead. In fact, by this time THEY HAD done some of those things, too! Remember, they just returned from their mission where, in the

name of Jesus, THEY taught and healed and cast out spirits. By this time...they should have confidence that Jesus can do whatever Jesus wants to do.

And yet...they forget. They keep forgetting. They keep doubting. So Jesus gives them a reminder. Not a string on the finger; not a note on the fridge; not an alarm on a cell phone. What? Baskets, miraculously full of bread and fish leftovers. How many baskets? 12! **How many disciples were there?** 12. Every single disciple got a basket of leftovers...the triumph of Jesus' abundance over scarcity. **I imagine a very sheepish look on their faces as, one by one, they set those heavy baskets down before the Lord...who takes little...or nothing...and creates abundance!**

I was thinking of my own life-long struggle with anxiety. I wonder if, at the core of it, **is the fact that I forget.** I forget the faithfulness of Jesus. I forget how he placed me in a family of faith, surrounded by people who loved me; how he gave me opportunities to serve at an early age, **multiplying my meager gifts**; how he blessed me with family, wealth, a sweetheart church, a fruitful ministry. I forget the goodness... generosity ... power of God in my life. He has always cared for me. Over and over again. **How about you? If you hold back in your service, your witness, your generosity ...could it be that you have forgotten all that Jesus has done for and given to you?**

THAT is what this table is about. It is why Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me." **This table is OUR basket of leftovers...**and we pull it out once in a while to remember God's faithfulness. And to strengthen OUR resolve to dive enthusiastically into the mission of Jesus...whatever that might be for us.

Earlier, I pointed out that this is the only miracle included in all four gospels. I wonder if this miracle was precious to the early church because they saw in it a prelude to the Lord's Supper. When Jesus again took bread...again looked up to heaven...again blessed...again broke... again gave. To his disciples...and this time to every person in the world who was hungry for his love. When you eat this meal...all will be satisfied!

You know...it is our hope that every one of us leaves every single worship service a little different. Changed, poked, prodded, convicted, encouraged, challenged. Maybe you leave today saying, "I might be shirking MY responsibility to the Lord." Well...here's your chance to do something about that. There's a world of hungry people out there. As you Jesus say, "YOU give them something to eat!"