

28 February 2021 – Mark 6:7–52

READING FROM MARK 6:7–52 (based on *The Message* translation)

Jesus called the Twelve disciples to him, and sent them out in pairs. He sent them off with these instructions: “Don’t think you need a lot of extra equipment. *You* are the equipment. Keep it simple. No luxury inns. Find a modest place to stay and be content there until you leave. If you’re not welcomed, not listened to, quietly withdraw. Shrug your shoulders and be on your way.”

Then they were out on the road, preaching with joyful urgency that life can be radically different; they brought wellness to the sick, anointing their bodies, healing their spirits.

King Herod heard about all this, for by this time the name of Jesus was on everyone’s lips. Herod said, “He must be John the Baptist come back from the dead.” Others said, “No, it’s Elijah.” Others said, “He’s a prophet, like one of the old-time prophets.”



Now Herod was the one who had ordered the arrest of John and sent him to prison at the nagging of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. For John had provoked Herod by naming his relationship with Herodias as adultery. Herodias wanted to kill John, but didn’t dare because Herod was in awe of him.

One day Herod threw a big birthday bash, inviting all the big wigs in Galilee. Herodias’s daughter danced for the guests and charmed Herod and all the others. The king said to the girl, “Ask me for something. I’ll give you anything you want.” She went to her mother and said, “What should I ask for?” Herodias made the grisly suggestion that she ask for the head of John the Baptist. So she went back to Herod and asked for the head of John the Baptist.

Unwilling to lose face with his guests, Herod caved in and granted her wish.

The apostles then caught up with Jesus and reported on all that they had been doing. Jesus said, “Come away; let’s take a break and get some rest.” For there

were crowds constantly coming and going. They didn't even have time to eat. So they got in the boat and went off to a remote place by themselves. But someone saw them going and word got around. From the surrounding towns people went on foot, running, and got there ahead of them. When Jesus arrived, he saw this huge crowd. At the sight of them, his heart broke—like sheep with no shepherd. He began to teach them.

When his disciples thought this had gone on long enough—it was now getting quite late in the day—they interrupted: “We’re a long way out in the country, and it’s late. Send these folks off so they can get some supper.”

Jesus said, “You do it. You fix supper for them.”

“Are you serious? You want us to go spend a fortune on food for their supper?”



But he was quite serious. “How many loaves of bread do you have?”

“Five,” they said, “plus two fish.”

Jesus got them all to sit down in groups of fifty.

He took the five loaves and two fish, lifted his face to heaven in prayer, blessed, broke and gave the bread to the disciples, and the

disciples in turn gave it to the people. He did the same with the fish. They all ate their fill. The disciples gathered twelve baskets of leftovers.

More than five thousand were at the supper.

As soon as the meal was finished, Jesus insisted that the disciples get in the boat and go on ahead across the lake while he dismissed the crowds. After sending them off, he climbed up on a mountain by himself to pray.

Late at night, the boat was far out at sea; Jesus was still on land. He could see the men struggling with the oars, the wind having come up against them. At about four o'clock in the morning, Jesus came toward them, walking on the sea. He intended to pass them by. But when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and screamed, scared to death.



Jesus was quick to comfort them: “Have Courage! It’s me. Don’t be afraid.” As soon as he climbed into the boat, the wind died down. They were stunned, shaking their heads, wondering what was going on. They didn’t understand what he had done at the supper. None of this had yet penetrated their hearts.

MESSAGE

Ministry alongside Jesus (discipleship 1)



There are many ways that we can train people to take on new tasks or fill a responsibility. There’s the **parent** approach ... see what I do and then you copy ... which is sometimes more like ‘do what I tell you’ and ignore what I **actually** do.

There’s the **classic classroom** approach which most of us enjoyed – or endured – at school with a teacher and students.



There’s **online learning** where you work through the material at a computer at your own pace and watch videos showing you how to do things, whether that’s at university or a Bunnings tutorial on how to build

your own decking.

Then there’s the **traditional apprenticeship** approach where people learn by watching the tradesperson in action and then directly apply what they’ve observed ... with hands on coaching.



The way that Jesus worked with his disciples was most like the apprenticeship model. The Gospel writer Mark tells us that there were two distinct parts to the training of the disciples. The **first part** was to **be with Jesus** – to watch and listen

and learn from Jesus as he taught and healed people – and how he dealt with critics. The **second part** of the training was **being sent out** to do similar tasks to Jesus – proclaiming the message and healing.

By the time we get to chapter 6 of Mark, the disciples have already seen and heard a lot from Jesus. They've seen him heal people, seen him deal with unclean spirits and heard his message about the kingdom of God. Up until this point in Mark's story the focus has been nearly all on Jesus as episode after episode asks the reader the question **'Who is this Jesus?'**.

Two key strands in Mark's story
1. Who is this Jesus?
2. What it means to be a follower of Jesus

Now it's the disciples' turn. Now they get an opportunity to go out and practice what they've learned from Jesus. So in today's reading we begin to see a second strand of Mark's story emerging, which is **what it means to be a follower of Jesus**. This was obviously a key part of Peter's later preaching, which Mark's Gospel is based on. And it's clearly important for later readers like us who claim to be followers of Jesus.

So as we work through today's material, we'll consider it from this second angle – what are some of the challenges and resources available to us as followers of Jesus?

The first episode sees Jesus sending out the disciples to extend his ministry. They are to preach a similar message – calling people to repent and turn back to God – and are to pray for the sick and cure people from unclean spirits. How are they to approach this task?

Jesus' approach to mission
Team ministry
Travel light
Rely on hospitality of others

- First, they're to go in pairs. It's to be a **team ministry**. Presumably not all the disciples were gifted speakers, so they can instead share their gifts as well as encourage and support one another.
- They're to **travel light** – taking no food, no money, no spare clothing. In other words they are to rely on others – and upon God – to provide what they need. As modern day Christians we may think that these are ridiculous instructions – but perhaps that's because we are so materialistic in our thinking and so wealthy compared to Jesus and his original disciples. The way of Jesus challenges us to think and act quite differently.
- The disciples are also to **rely on the hospitality of others**, as indeed was Jesus. But unlike today, there was a culture of travelling prophets and philosophers who lived in this way and who were provided for. The movement in mission, though, was to go **to the people** and accept their hospitality rather than **invite people back** to your own home base, whether in Capernaum or Croydon North. Again, a challenging message for us to hear.

We're told that the disciples followed these instructions and were quite successful in extending and replicating Jesus' ministry.



We then have a seemingly unrelated story about **King Herod and John the Baptist**, who was arrested back in chapter 1. The connection – as we will learn – is that Herod has actually killed John – but then hears reports about Jesus’

ministry and thinks Jesus sounds like another John – or John resurrected. We have to wonder why this story – with its gory detail – is included in the Gospel story about the life and death of Jesus.

And it’s this last point that provides the connection.

Herod was a cruel and immoral king. He arrested John because he didn’t like John’s message. He had John killed in a violent manner without a proper trial – to satisfy the whim of someone who saw John as a threat, namely his wife Herodias.

This is all a foretaste of what will happen to Jesus.



Pilate was the Roman Governor and he too was known to be cruel. He arrested Jesus on the whim of those who saw Jesus as a threat, namely the High priests. He sentenced Jesus to death without a proper trial and in a very violent manner by having him crucified on a cross.

What has this to do with followers of Jesus? There is a pattern that emerges. Those who speak up for God’s ways – like John and Jesus – will arouse opponents who may well make them suffer and even kill them. In just a couple of chapters’ time, Jesus will say this to all his potential followers:

If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

The lesson for us – following Jesus will be difficult and may involve suffering.

We have been warned.

The third story today is the well-known story of **the feeding of the 5000**. This story can be thought about from various angles with its echoes of God feeding the Israelites in the wilderness with manna or Jesus breaking bread at the Last Supper and our sharing of



Communion. The angle I want to explore briefly today is the role of the disciples: They see a **problem** – a big crowd, hungry people, it’s late.

They also see a **solution** – send the people away so they can buy dinner.

Jesus has an **alternative solution** – **you** give them something to eat!

The disciples now have an **alternative problem** – who? us? We don’t have the resources.

The **wisdom from Jesus** – what do you already have at your disposal?

The **response** – not much – just five loaves and two fish.

We know how the story turns out, even if there is mystery involved ... how did so little feed so many? Mark doesn’t tell us exactly what happened – just that everyone ate their fill and there was plenty left over.



The learning point for followers of Jesus seems to be don’t focus on the size of the problem, but instead focus on what resources and gifts you have available – and trust God to make that ‘little’ turn into

'enough'. Our God provides **abundantly** ... yet often we think small or scarce. God will provide what we need – and more!

Then there is the fourth story about **Jesus walking on the water** ... and how the disciples are once again terrified by what they see of Jesus ...

I want to think about this story in terms of what it means to follow Jesus when he is absent. Unlike the previous boating story with the storm, Jesus is **not** with the disciples this time. He has sent them on ahead while he dismisses the crowd and then



climbs up a mountain to pray. The disciples are **alone** in the boat, out on the lake, in darkness, with the wind against them. Many commentators have viewed this story as a **metaphor for the church**, alone in a dark world and facing various difficulties.

The learning point is not to focus on the darkness or the difficulties, but rather to know that Jesus is **still present**, even if feels as though he is absent. Also to remember that Jesus **sees** what is happening, just as he sees the boat in difficulty. And third, that Jesus doesn't leave us alone to flounder, but rather **comes to us** – perhaps through prayer or through circumstances – just as he came to the disciples struggling out on the lake. Jesus is **Emmanuel**, God with us.

So what we see in today's reading from Mark is a second strand in the story that is about what it means to follow Jesus. This will not be easy or straight forward and will indeed stretch our faith in multiple ways. But the good news that shines through is that we do not walk this journey alone but with one another for encouragement. As we spend time with Jesus, he will equip us for the task, will

use and build on what we already have to hand and will be present with us in the midst of our difficulties.

As our next hymn teaches us ... **Guide me O thou great Redeemer** ... is that

- we may be weak, but God is mighty and will guide us
- We may feel our lack, but God will provide for us
- We may at times be afraid, but God has our ultimate future assured