

Tonight we are going to sing the *whole* of Psalm 78.

And there is a reason for this.

In Mark 6 Mark will tell us that the disciples did not understand the loaves.

If you understand Psalm 78 you will understand the loaves.

Psalm 78 starts by saying that the next generation needs to remember the works of God.

Do not forget the Exodus.

Do not forget how God led Israel through the Sea.

Do not forget how God made streams flow from the rock,

and how God fed you with bread from heaven.

Do not forget how God brought judgment upon the rebels in the wilderness.

Do not forget God’s mighty judgments against Egypt.

And do not forget how he rejected Israel

and forsook his dwelling at Shiloh in the days of Eli the high priest,

and how he chose David to shepherd Israel.

If you understand Psalm 78

then you understand that David *is* the new Israel;

David is called to do and to be all that Israel was called to do and to be.

I should add one more thing:

after the exile, when God once again had rejected Israel

and delivered “his glory to the hand of the foe”

Israel would continue to sing Psalm 78.

Jesus would have sung Psalm 78 throughout his life.

And Jesus was the faithful generation who remembered the works of God.

Jesus was the son of David who was called to do and to be

all that Israel was called to do and to be.

And what is more,

Jesus is also the Holy One of Israel, the Most High God

who gave his people bread in the wilderness –

who led his people through the sea –

and who put his adversaries to rout and put them to everlasting shame!

And so let us sing Psalm 78.

Sing v1-25

Read v26-48

Sing v49-64

Read v65-72

Brandon showed us last time how the power of the kingdom can even overcome unbelief, as Jesus healed a few sick people in spite of the unbelief in Nazareth. Brandon has also been showing us how Jesus is proclaiming the return from Exile – the new Exodus.

Tonight these two themes come together in the feeding of the five thousand. The meaning of the five loaves is so important that Mark will point back to it in verse 52, using it to explain why even the disciples do not understand what Jesus is doing.

But what is interesting is that Mark himself never “explains” the five loaves.

I need to map out what Mark is doing here.

Mark 1-5 has laid out the basic pattern of Jesus’ ministry.

This is the beginning of the gospel of Jesus.

The message of Jesus is “the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; Repent and believe the gospel.” (Mark 1:15)

Mark 6:6 brings this section to its conclusion:

“And he went about among the villages teaching.”

The calling of the 12 apostles was the centerpiece of Part One of Mark’s gospel (3:13-19)

The sending of the 12 apostles and the story of the death of John the Baptist signals the beginning of Part Two of Mark’s gospel (just as John signaled the beginning of Jesus’ ministry in chapter 1).

The death of John the Baptist signals to the reader what is coming at the end of Jesus’ ministry as well.

If Herod killed John at the behest of others, even though he knew John was innocent, what will he do to Jesus?

I should also note that Part 1 ended with Jesus crossing the Sea of Galilee (there and back again). Part 2 now begins with another crossing (there and back again).

Part 2 of Mark’s gospel takes us from the sending of the 12 and death of John the Baptist to the feeding of the 4,000 (6:7-8:26)

The feeding of the 5,000 (Mark 6:30-43) and the feeding of the 4,000 (Mark 8:1-10) are the central actions of Jesus ministry during this part of Mark’s gospel.

And Mark calls our attention to this by highlighting these feedings even in the rest of the narrative:

Mark says that the disciples “did not understand about the loaves” (6:52) and therefore did not understand how Jesus could walk on water.

The discussion about defilement in 7:1-23 starts with a conversation about eating.

The Syro-Phoenician woman follows this up by saying that Gentile dogs may eat the crumbs left over from the Jewish feast.

And then after Jesus feeds the 4,000 in 8:1-10
he warns his disciples about the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod.
And when the disciples think that this means ordinary bread,
Jesus concludes this section by explicitly reminding them
of the feeding of the 5,000 and the 4,000.

In other words, Mark 6-8 is all about these two feedings.
If you do not understand the point of these two feedings
then you do not understand the point of Jesus' coming.

But also notice that neither Jesus nor Mark takes the time to explain it.
Jesus, and Mark after him, take the view that if you don't get it,
there is no point in wasting the time to explain it to you!

1. Five Loaves and Two Fish (6:30-44)

*30 The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught.
31 And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while."
For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.
32 And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves.*

Remember the context.

In 6:7 Jesus had sent out the 12 to preach and cast out demons.
Now they return and report on their ministry.
Notice also how word and deed go together.
"All that they had done and taught" (6:30).

They return-
but they are weary with their labors.
And so Jesus calls them to come away to a desolate place and rest.

It is important for those who "do and teach" to spend time with each other.
This is one of the things I especially appreciate and enjoy about Presbytery work,
or even going to General Assembly.

While it can be too busy sometimes,
it is refreshing to spend time with other ministers and elders.

The time that I will be spending in Scotland next year is designed to be that sort of time.

But if you are trying to get away by yourselves
you need to find a better means of transportation than an open boat!

*33 Now many saw them going and recognized them,
and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.
34 When he went ashore he saw a great crowd,
and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.
And he began to teach them many things.*

Notice how eager the people are to hear the preaching of the Word!
The crowds see Jesus in a boat,
and they run along the shore in order to hear his teaching.

And Jesus sees the crowds.
And he sees that they are like sheep without a shepherd.
Psalm 78 said that David was to shepherd Israel.
Jesus sees *his* people.
These are *his* sheep.
And so he shepherds them.

How does a shepherd lead his sheep?
By his voice.
My sheep know my voice and they follow me.

And so Jesus teaches the people many things.

While Mark does not go into detail on the teaching of Jesus,
we can assume that the basic message hasn't changed:
the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand;
therefore repent and believe the gospel!

*35 And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said,
"This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late.
36 Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages
and buy themselves something to eat."*

Hmmm.
A large crowd in a desolate place—a wilderness—
and now there is some concern about whether there is enough to eat!

It sounds an awful lot like when Moses led the Israelites through the wilderness...!!

37 But he answered them, "You give them something to eat."

You are my interns—you handle it!
The twelve are to imitate Jesus—but they don't get it yet!

*And they said to him, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread
and give it to them to eat?"*

*38 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."*

*39 Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass.
40 So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties.*

(Incidentally, we saw a couple weeks ago that Jesus cast out a “Legion” of demons;
now Jesus has a legion of his own—a Roman legion was about 5,000 men).

*41 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.
42 And they all ate and were satisfied.*

It must have been remarkable for the 12 as they kept handing out bread,
and discovered that their basket wasn't empty yet!
—sort of like the widow at the beginning of 2 Kings 4!
—or like the loaves of bread that Elisha multiplied at the end of 2 Kings 4.

*43 And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish.
44 And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men.*

Elisha fed 100 men with 20 barley loaves.

Moses gave Israel bread from heaven.

What does this mean?

Jesus is the new Moses.
He is the new Elijah/Elisha,
who gives bread from heaven.

And 12 baskets were left over--enough to feed the 12 tribes of Israel.
The bread from heaven that Jesus gives is enough to feed ALL of his people.

But unlike some of the other gospels
Mark does not linger here.
He will keep coming back to this episode,
but he feels no compulsion to explain it.

The explanation will be found in the narrative itself!

Instead, he says:

2. They Were Astounded Because They Did Understand about the Loaves (6:45-52)
*45 Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat
and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd.
46 And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray.*

In other words,
Jesus does not explain anything.

He immediately sends them away in the boat,
while he goes alone upon the mountain to pray.

Finally,

after feeding the sheep and caring for his flock,
Jesus gets the time that he needs to pray.

We should note that even our Lord Jesus Christ needed to pray.
Even when we are busy with seeking first the kingdom of God,
we *must* take the time to pray.

Do you?

Do you find refreshment in communion with your heavenly Father?
After all, you have been adopted.

You have been made a fellow heir with Jesus.

And even as our Lord found refreshment in his time of solitude with God,
so also we should seek these times.

Too often we allow the busyness of life to get in the way.
We have so many things to do!

And certainly, we have seen that Jesus himself postponed his time of prayer
in order to feed the sheep –
in order to fulfill his calling as the Shepherd-King.

But (and this is the key!)

he only postponed the time of prayer!

He did not cancel it!

Do not think for a moment that your busyness is a substitute for prayer.

Do not think for a moment that you can substitute service for prayer.

Yes, God wants you to demonstrate your love for him in what you do.

But he *will* have you for himself!

Also notice in verse 47 that even as our Lord prays,
he sees what is happening to his disciples.

47 And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land.

48 And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them.

Jesus is watching them as they exhaust themselves,
rowing against the wind.

*And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea.
He meant to pass by them,*

You can only imagine what they must have thought!
They are manfully laboring at the oars,

and here comes Jesus, just walking past them
like he's on dry land...

*49 but when they saw him walking on the sea
they thought it was a ghost, and cried out,
50 for they all saw him and were terrified.
But immediately he spoke to them and said,
"Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid."
51 And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased.
And they were utterly astounded, 52 for they did not understand about the loaves,
but their hearts were hardened.*

Do you understand about the loaves?

Or are your hearts hardened too?

When Jesus says "Take heart" he is quoting Elijah
who said to the widow, "make a cake for me first"
and then the jar of flour and the jar of oil did not run out.
And when Jesus says "It is I" (ego eimi)
he is using the same words that God spoke to Moses at the burning bush.

And as he walks past them across the lake
they should have thought of how Moses led Israel across the Red Sea
as they came out of Egypt.

After all, he has already fed them with bread from heaven.
If they understood about the loaves,
they would have known that Jesus had come to lead a new Exodus –
that Jesus had come to restore Israel from Exile.

But like Pharaoh their hearts were hardened.
They did not understand about the loaves.

3. The Power of the Kingdom – Even to Those Who Don't Get It (6:53-56)

*53 When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored to the shore.
54 And when they got out of the boat, the people immediately recognized him
55 and ran about the whole region
and began to bring the sick people on their beds
to wherever they heard he was.*

If the disciples' hearts are hardened –
if *they* don't get it –
how much less the people of Gennesaret?!

What they see is that the wonder worker has come.

And the word goes out:

the healer – the prophet – the wonder worker has come to town!

56 And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or countryside,

they laid the sick in the marketplaces

and implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment.

And as many as touched it were made well.

Neither Jesus nor Mark rebukes the crowds for their lack of faith.

Indeed, both Jesus and Mark appear to welcome the crowds.

You don't have to understand everything about who Jesus is.

But you do have to come to Jesus!

In one sense, the 12 – who are preaching the coming of the kingdom

and casting out demons in the name of Jesus –

are worse than the crowds!

They have seen the power of the kingdom.

They have heard the meaning of the kingdom.

And yet their hearts are hard and they don't understand about the loaves.

But the crowds come to Jesus –

at least believing that he will make them well.

I think sometimes we shy away from the “magical” sounding passages like this.

All they do is touch the fringe of his garment and they are healed!

Such is the power of the kingdom of God.

Such is the power of the KING.

Even touching his garment makes the sick well.

Paul says in Romans 13:14

“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh,
to gratify its desires.”

Christ himself is your garment.

Put on Christ –

who forgives all your iniquity,

who heals all your diseases,

who redeems your life from the pit,

who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,

who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

Jesus Christ is the King who brings the new Exodus,
who leads his Israel out of Exile,
and raises us up out of death into life.

He is our garment – our clothing –
who brings healing both to our souls and our bodies!

Yes, Jesus brings healing to your body –
maybe not in this life (though he has been known to do that too!) –
but certainly through the resurrection of the dead.

If you would understand about the loaves, then you need to see Jesus
as the new Moses, the new Elijah, the new David –
the one who brings Israel back from Exile,
and shepherds his flock by leading them out of bondage to sin and death,
and by teaching them his Word.

Remember this,
because it is through the reading and preaching of the Word of God
that Jesus shepherds you.