

Sunday Lesson – July 18, 2021

GOSPEL: Mark 6: 30-34; 53-56

The Disciples Return from the Mission

Background

“Mark likes to insert one story into another, and the story of John the Baptist’s execution last week was one of those insertions. Now Mark brings us back to Galilee, as the disciples return from their preaching expedition. It’s been a good trip, and they are eager to tell Jesus all about it, but they are also *really* tired.” (*Excerpts from pastorsings.com/2018/07/21/gut-wrenching-compassion-sermon-on-mark-630-34-53-56/*)

Insight

“The passages that make up the Gospel reading for today serve in important ways to advance Mark’s central concern: the inauguration of the kingdom of God in Jesus. These verses emphasize Jesus’ identity as the true, divine shepherd, who will guide his sheep into the kingdom; and the nature of that kingdom, through healings that disrupt the economy of this world.” (*Excerpts from workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/ordinary-16-2/commentary-on-mark-630-34-53-56-3#:~:text=He%20sends%20the,of%20this%20world*)

Gospel Reading

30-34 “The apostles then rendezvoused with Jesus and reported on all that they had done and taught. Jesus said, “Come off by yourselves; let’s take a break and get a little rest.” For there was constant 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. Someone saw them going and the word got around. From the surrounding towns people went out 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 they were. He went right to work teaching them.



53-56 They beached the boat at Gennesaret and tied up at the landing. As soon as they got out of the boat, word got around fast. People ran this way and that, bringing their sick on stretchers to where they heard he was. Wherever he went, village or town or country crossroads, they brought their sick to the marketplace and begged him to let them touch the edge of his coat—that’s all. And whoever touched him became well.”

The Message

What It Could Mean?

“As John’s mission came to an end, the apostles’ mission had just begun. The only other time Mark used the term “apostles” for Jesus’ disciples was in 3:14. While closely associating the two missions (John’s and Jesus’), Mark also clearly delineated between the two leaders and their bands in the story. Jesus’ immediate reaction was to secure a private place for his disciples to rest.

The “wilderness,” which had provided Jesus with relief earlier (Mark 1:35), seemed like a logical choice (see Mark 1:3-4, 12-13, 35, 45; 6:31, 32, 35). This is a place of “rest” and “restoration” in the Markan narrative (1:35; 6:31, 32), but is also a location on the periphery (1:45). Locating a place to eat leisurely was becoming increasingly difficult (3:20). The reference to food again expressed how Jesus’ mission was directly tied to basic economic realities. Food and eating were two prominent themes of the narrative (Mark 1:6; 2:16, 26; 3:30; 5:43; 7:2-5, 28; 11:14; 14:12-24) and received specific attention in the two “feeding” narratives (6:34-44; 8:1-9).

While the success of Jesus’ “apostles” loomed large for the future of the mission, the death of John at the hands of Herod(ias) loomed larger. The mission may not be completely defeated, but drastic persecutions would be part and parcel of the operation. The message was clear: do not expect to take on the ruling authorities and not suffer the consequences. That was

the message for the Markan community. That was the warning for all future followers.

This short summary showed just how large Jesus' following had become. Not only was the mission expanding—as the work of the apostles had shown (6:30)—but many regularly attempted to track down Jesus. In this passage, Mark described them (“many” from *polloi* in 6:33) as running faster on foot than those traveling by boat. They were intent on locating Jesus. Yet, when Jesus saw them, he viewed them as “sheep without a shepherd,” an image of their vulnerability. (“Compassion” [from *splagchnizomai* in 6:34] was one of Jesus' more common emotions expressed in the Markan narrative [for example, Mark 8:2; 9:22; cf. some manuscripts at 1:41].)

All references to this phrase (“sheep without a shepherd”) in the Hebrew Bible support this idea: it was used in scenes in which God stands *over against* abusive shepherds who no longer care for their sheep (e.g., Ezekiel 34:2-5 and Zechariah 11:4-17); and, Moses requested that the people not be left as “sheep without a shepherd” in light of his own failing (Numbers 27:17), to which the Lord responds by suggesting Joshua “in whom is the spirit” (Numbers 27:18).

At this stage in the Markan narrative, Jesus' reaction must be a critique of Herod in the previous scene. Herod held feasts for the “leaders of Galilee,” but Jesus fed common people. Mark's juxtaposition of these two “shepherds” and their activities centered on issues of food and associations in the first century. Here was one instance of how, for Mark, Jesus “shepherded” the “sheep” of Israel. Jesus' feeding was a reminder of how Moses provided food for the people of Israel in the ancient wilderness (cf Numbers 27). The importance of food *and* community cannot be overstated as a primary function of first century life in the Mediterranean life.

Summary statements, as in 6:53-56, were significant asides. On the one hand, they provided transitions in the overall story.

On the other hand, the narrator often provided insight into the flow and development of the plot of the story in these narrative asides. Repetition would have been a key feature in such summaries, because they reminded listeners (in an aural environment) of several key features of the overall story. In a fine study on summary statements, Charles Hedrick concludes that summary statements generally “summarize some new aspect of the ministry of Jesus ... and seem to function as narrative devices that broaden, expand and intensify the ministry of Jesus and its effect.”

In comparison to earlier summaries, 6:53-56 reminded its audience of the impossibility of Jesus entering towns unnoticed. Also, this summary statement addresses the idea of touching Jesus again. The desire to touch *him*, in an earlier summary statement, has now shifted to a desire to touch *his garments*. In between these two summary statements, readers witnessed a successful healing story through only a touch of his garments.”

(Excerpts from workingpreacher.org by Emerson Powery)

Readings for Further Study

- [Ezekiel 34: 2-5/Zechariah 11: 4-17](#) *God stands over abusive shepherds*
- [John 10:11 & 14/Isaiah 40:11/1 Peter 5:4/Micah 5:4/Hebrews 13:20](#) *Christ, The Shepherd*

Thought for the Day

“The endless cycle of idea and action, endless invention, endless experiment, brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness; knowledge of speech, but not of silence; knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word.” ~ *TS Eliot - “Choruses from The Rock”*

Psalm 23 Prayer

“Be our shepherd, O Lord, and bless us with all good things that we may be refreshed with your overflowing cup and dwell in your house forever; through Jesus Christ our Lord.”
Amen. ~ *Ludolph of Saxony, d. 1378*