

## “We Are Not Sheep Without a Shepherd”

Mark 6:30-44

The seamless connection of Old and New Testament is truly amazing. God had a plan from the beginning. God foreshadowed that plan throughout the Old Testament continually revealing more and more until Jesus of Nazareth enters the world. God carries out His plan for the Christ, the Messiah promised of old to be the Good Shepherd, the Son of David who would reign on His throne forever, bring full and complete forgiveness, and allow God’s children to, as David says in Psalm 23, “dwell in the House of the Lord forever.”

We see this connection of Old and New Testament in our Gospel reading for today with the feeding of the 5000. First, we need a little context. Immediately preceding Mark’s account of this great feeding in the wilderness, Jesus had sent out the apostles – and they preached repentance and forgiveness, performed miracles, cast out demons, healed the sick. They were excited about all that they were able to do.

And then we heard our Gospel reading from last week, John the Baptist gets imprisoned and beheaded by King Herod. Being in the Kingdom of Christ does not mean success and glory, and living your best life is not what is promised. The world which hated Christ first sees us as sheep to be slaughtered. Thankfully, we have a Good Shepherd.

We have already seen in Mark's Gospel these past few weeks in our readings, Jesus was rejected by the people of His hometown of Nazareth. Jesus warns His disciples that entire towns will reject their message. Be prepared to shake the dust off of your feet as a testimony against them. In the coming chapters, the Pharisees are going to repeatedly challenge and reject Jesus and His Word. That was life in the kingdom then – that is life in the kingdom now.

As Jesus is accustomed to doing, He leaves the crowd behind and takes His disciples to a desolate place – not a barren wilderness; there is grassy place, a green pasture for the crowd on which to sit down.

I believe it is not any sort of a stretch to see an Exodus motif with the Lord God being tangibly present with His people, and speaking to the multitude of Israelites through a prophet. Remember that Moses said that another prophet even greater than himself would come. Jesus is both a prophet of God and is God Himself. He is the “Word made flesh who dwelt among us.”

This is Mark's point all through His Gospel, the prophet is the Lord. The demons know it and say, “What have you to do with [us], Jesus, Son of the Most High God?” [Mk. 5:7]. The Roman Centurion knows it and expresses great faith in the authority that Jesus has. Why don't you Israelites know it? You have the Word of Moses and the Prophets. Why don't you recognize the Messiah promised of old as you see what was foretold play out before your eyes?

What is interesting to me is that when Moses dies, Joshua is appointed as the leader of the people. The Lord did not want to leave His

people to be like sheep without a shepherd. The name Jesus is the English transliteration of the Greek translation of the Hebrew name Yeshua, or as we would say it: Joshua – which means, “The Lord saves.”

So when “Jesus” comes out and sees this great crowd who are like sheep without a shepherd, He has compassion on them. This “Joshua,” this Jesus of Nazareth is the prophet who would come after Moses, and would be the one who was even greater than Moses.

In the Old Testament, that Joshua led the people through the wilderness into the Promised Land – a land flowing with milk and honey. Jesus, through His death and resurrection will lead us into the ultimate Promised Land through our own resurrection of the body. And the Lord will be our Shepherd and “I shall not want.” That is, I shall not be lacking anything. A Psalm 23 motif runs throughout this text also.

In the meantime, after a day of listening and being fed the Word of God, the day has gotten away from the crowd and the people are hungry. So Jesus is going to feed the Israelites out in the wilderness with “bread from heaven” like the manna in the wilderness in the days of Moses. But first, He tells the disciples to do it. They had just gotten back from their being sent out and healing the sick and casting out demons, and performing miracles and their only solution to the problem they can think of is to either send the crowd away or spend their life savings on a meal. It will be a couple more chapters before Peter utters his great confession of faith, and then they have a few more moments of stumbling before the fullness of what they have is revealed.

Notice Jesus' emphasis on talking about the bread (not that the fish don't matter), but there are certainly Holy Communion overtones which we see all four Gospel writers picked up on. Mark even concludes, "And those who ate the loaves were 5000 men." His focus is on the bread. What is seen is Jesus taking what happened in the Old Testament and giving it a greater reality. In my devotional reading this week, I read in Isaiah 49, "They shall feed along the ways . . . They shall not hunger or thirst . . . for He who has pity on them will lead them."

All of this should point to who Jesus is – the Promised One who has compassion on them, (has pity on them), feeds them with bread from heaven. The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. . . You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies." Those living in the kingdom, as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we do so with enemies all around us, but we are not sheep without a Shepherd.

Our "cup runneth over." Just as the 12 baskets of bread gathered up by the disciples were overflowing after everyone ate and were satisfied, so also the mercy and righteousness found in the bread and the cup offered to us is not limited. It is with confidence that we can look to our Lord and Savior who is the Living Bread which came down from heaven and in the words of King David boldly and confidently greet each day with David's words, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Amen.