

This past week was our week to serve at Cornerstone. Anji came up with the great idea to have a taco bar, and it was a great success. I already said thanks to Dawn and Anji for shopping, and to everyone who helped to prep and serve, but I'll say it again—thank you! Our Cornerstone dinners are one of the more successful things we've done since I came here, thanks to all of you all who help out with cutting and chopping and cooking on Mondays, which I can't be there for, and the serving on Tuesdays too. I was looking around while we were there on Tuesday and I noticed things like, Carol is a natural at talking to people and she and Dan make a great team in serving the milk; Bill always gets people started right by keeping things going at the first of the line; Jean and Darlene and Jo and Dawn and Bob Schomaker keep the line moving smoothly and help people carry food if they need help. On Tuesday I plated desserts and stayed out of the way as the mass of people came through the line. I guesstimate that we served at least 120 people and maybe more—so many that we didn't have much left over to offer second helpings. By the end of the night we were hot, we were tired, but we felt really good about what we had done.

And I have to say it reminded me a little bit of our story from scripture for today. The disciples have returned from their venture into the towns and villages in Galilee and they were tired but were excited and felt good about what they had done. Before they left Jesus had gifted them with power to heal and teach, just as he did, and I get the feeling that they were kind of amazed with themselves. But they were tired, as we get tired when we put ourselves out there, and Jesus wanted to take them away to a quiet place for some rest.

But the people recognized them and saw where they were going and went ahead of them—and they told other people in the towns and villages to come too. And instead of being alone when Jesus and the disciples got there, there were *even more people!* And Jesus, being Jesus, has compassion for them and begins to teach them, hearing their stories and talking to them about many things. The word that is translated here from the Greek as “compassion” literally means “to suffer with”—Jesus saw the people and felt their suffering and he himself suffered with them. It doesn't say *what* Jesus taught them; but as they were “like sheep without a shepherd” my guess is that they needed *guidance*, and *love*, so he probably taught them about the love of a God who they could love in return by loving each other. And we show the love of that same God to people every time we prepare and serve food at Cornerstone.

This is the end of what we might think of as “Mark, Part I: The Ministry to Galilee.” We've been following this story arc for the past several weeks and here we are at the end. The travelling band of disciples and Jesus move forward once more and come to yet another place, Gennesaret, where there is yet another great crowd of people waiting for them. People came from miles around just to seek the healing of Jesus, just to touch his robe, and the chapter (and the story arc) comes to a close with the statement that “all who touched it were healed.”

Wouldn't it be nice if we could be like that: that everyone who came to us for help could be healed by us? Or fed by us? Wouldn't it be nice if *we* could be healed like that *ourselves*?

The things we do in the community should be, and are I think, ways of helping to heal the world around us. Our Cornerstone ministry not only provides a meal to anyone who shows up but provides a time of fellowship for the people who come, with each other and with us, as well as for us among ourselves. I believe that fellowship, the act of being together in community, is inherently healing -- which may be why it's so scary to do with strangers. It's easy to give out food, it's harder to sit with someone you don't know and make conversation and open yourself to knowing them and letting them know you, even just a little. Once we begin to know each other it's a lot harder to ignore each others'

humanity and realize that we have more in common than we might think—and that's where the healing begins. God's love shows in the care we take with food prep and with the respect we show the people we're serving just by treating them like human beings. Talking to them as they come through the line, sometimes sitting with them, meeting their need for food for at least a little while. The need for food is one thing we all have in common, and in that way a community meal brings us together in our shared humanity in a way that not much else does.

This summer I've been writing bulletin inserts and blog entries entitled *Reading Between the Lectionary Lines*, in which I've tried to emphasize the storyline of this part of Mark. As you may know, the lectionary—that framework of scripture passages that many pastors use to organize their preaching from week to week—sometimes leaves out chunks of scripture, or perhaps only uses a story or two from a particular book. This is particularly true for Old Testament books, but it happens in the New Testament as well. I have been trying this summer, as we've moved through Mark, to add back in some of the parts that were skipped over by the people who put the lectionary together, in order to help us see the story as a whole and not just unconnected parts. We've been lucky, really, because Mark is a shorter book than the other gospels and more of it is included in our lectionary readings. But there have been some parts we've skipped over, particularly in today's lesson.

Between the time that Jesus is teaching the people and the disciples and Jesus arrive in Gennesaret we miss two important stories to this section of Mark. First we miss the feeding of the 5000 and then we miss Jesus walking on the water. Both of these are familiar stories to us—the feeding story is found in all 4 gospels, and the image of Jesus walking on water is iconic to our faith tradition—so it seems odd to me that we skip over them. I believe that like any writer, the writer of Mark's gospel didn't just randomly write down events from Jesus' life, all higgledy-piggledy; I think there was purpose to the order. Method to Mark's madness, we might say. The purpose would be what the purpose of any writer would be: to outline a character and tell us who that character is through the things he or she does. In a way it's a typical 'quest' story; the character and his companions are on a journey; there are obstacles to overcome and something they are trying to achieve.

In Mark Part I: the Ministry to Galilee we have seen Jesus' reputation and power grow. The story of the feeding of the 5000 reminds us of the participatory nature of being a Christ follower; in other words, the disciples couldn't and we can't just watch what Jesus does we have to do what Jesus did. If we fail to do that we have failed Jesus. The pairing of these last two stories in this story arc tells us that.

We remember that Jesus has been teaching the people and it begins to get late; and the disciples, who have just come back from working the same kinds of wonders that Jesus has done, have no idea how these people are going to eat. They go to Jesus and tell him to send the people away; but Jesus says that they should feed the people. The disciples are back to concrete thinking: where are we going to get the money to buy food for all of these people? Remember, again, they are newly back from doing miraculous things in the manner of Jesus; but that they can work a miracle here doesn't occur to them.

He tells them to find out how much food there is, and of course they find 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish, and they give it to Jesus. And he *shows them what to do*: he takes the bread and fish and holds them up and blesses them. He calls on the power of God to feed the people, power that he has already shared with the disciples. And they pass the food around and there is plenty for everyone, with leftovers to spare.

Later Jesus sends the disciples on ahead of him in the boat, and late in the night they see a figure coming towards them across the water. At first they believe it to be a ghost and they are terrified; but

then Jesus calls out *it is me! Don't be afraid!* And he gets into the boat with them and they are astounded. But, the text says, they still didn't understand about the bread and their hearts were hardened. This is a troubling thing that the gospel writer says here; troubling because not too much earlier the disciples had seemed on the cusp of being full participants in Jesus' ministry. But they aren't there yet; in fact, they almost seem to have taken a step backwards.

And ministry is like that sometimes; sometimes it is rewarding and fruitful and healing for the one doing or giving of themselves, and the one receiving or participating. Sometimes its frustrating and difficult and our hearts, or the hearts of those we're trying to reach, are hardened. But we are called to push forward, to allow God to do things in us and through us even when we don't understand; we are called to follow Jesus in ministry, inviting Jesus to share his power with us so that we might also heal and teach and repair the broken places in the world. Amen.