

## **“YOU GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO EAT”**

Mark 6:30-56

Key Verse: 6:37a

“But he answered, ‘You give them something to eat.’”

I would like to start this message with a story that goes back to 1963, when Missionary Sarah Barry and the late Dr. Samuel Lee worked together in Gwangju, Korea. As they served college students with the word of God and prayer, it was necessary to print some study materials. Miss Barry suggested that Korean students collect money to pay the cost. Mr. Lee strongly disagreed. At that time, the Korean war had just ended, and many poor widows and orphans needed basic provisions. Relief goods pouring in from America were a blessing to them. And in that environment, Mr. Lee expected Miss Barry, a rich American, to pay for the printing. But Miss Barry was concerned that able young Koreans were developing a dependent spirit. The two of them argued vehemently until Miss Barry broke down in tears. Mr. Lee was ashamed of causing a woman to cry. That night, unable to sleep, he read the Bible. He realized that God gave his one and only Son Jesus to save sinners. And Jesus taught his disciples a giving spirit, saying, “You give them something to eat.” So he went up on a mountain and cried out to God in repentance all night, pulling grass up by the roots until his hands became bloody. On coming down, he began to teach a giving spirit, saying, “Let’s stretch out our leper-like shrunken fingers and give to others so that the tide of God’s blessing may turn toward Korea.” Many young people were moved by this teaching and began giving in support of sending missionaries. They sacrificed, even to the point of selling their blood for offering money, as Dr. Joseph Chung did. The first missionary went to Jeju Island; it was part of Korea but was “across the sea.” This was the starting point of a great missionary movement from Korea to the whole world. We will see the fruit of this movement at the upcoming World Mission Report. This story shows us how powerfully Jesus’ words in this passage have worked to transform people and even a nation. Jesus’ words are timeless truth; they still work mightily to transform people. As we will see today, Jesus shepherds a large crowd with compassion. While doing so, he challenges his disciples to be shepherds. Then Jesus shepherds his disciples through a personal visitation, walking on water. Let’s listen to Jesus’ words and learn how to practice them.

First, Jesus shepherds a large crowd with compassion (30-44). When the twelve were with Jesus they were “disciples” who learned from him. When Jesus sent them to the surrounding villages, they were “apostles” who proclaimed his message to others. Learning from Jesus and then putting his teachings into practice by serving others is essential for Christian growth. Upon returning, the twelve reported to Jesus what they had done (30). There had been a great spiritual revival through their preaching, and they were full of joy and energy as they shared their accounts. However, Jesus knew that they were really exhausted. And so many people who had received God’s word through them were coming

and going that the disciples did not even have time to eat (31a). So Jesus said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest" (31b). They must have been happy as they got into the boat with Jesus.

Many people who saw them leaving recognized them. They observed the boat's movement from land, anticipated its destination, and ran on foot from all the towns, arriving ahead of Jesus and his disciples. What motivated them? They had experienced God's love through Jesus. It was so sweet and powerful. They were eager to have more of Jesus. So they came shamelessly, interrupting Jesus' plans. How did Jesus view them? Let us read verse 34. "When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things." From what perspective we see others is indeed important. If we have a self-centered perspective, we will feel irritated and frustrated by a rude interruption. We may say with a grumbling heart, "Why do you keep following me like paparazzi?!" But if we see from their point of view, we try to understand their situation and their agony. We may say to ourselves with genuine concern, "Oh my! They really need help!" When Jesus saw the large crowd, he had compassion on them. Compassion means to share the same feeling. Jesus put himself in their places and understood their pains, sorrows, and frustrations. He wanted to comfort, encourage, and strengthen them one by one, like a mother with her children.

For what reason did Jesus have compassion on them? It was because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Sheep are most meek animals. They do not have defensive capabilities, such as a shell or camouflage, to protect themselves. Nor do they have offensive capabilities, such as sharp teeth or claws, to attack other animals. Their eyes are on the sides of their heads, which gives them a wide range of vision; however, they can hardly see what is right in front of them. They have no sense of direction and move slowly. They easily get lost and become the prey of predators. Their good point is that they respond well to care and have sensitive hearing. They form strong bonds and are willing to follow their shepherd. In fact, their existence depends on their shepherd. Sheep without shepherds are vulnerable and become fearful and desperate. They absolutely need a shepherd.

The Bible often compares God to a shepherd and his people to sheep. David wrote in Psalm 23:1, "The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing." On the other hand, without God human beings are vulnerable, helpless, and lost. They suffer under the terrible burden of sin and the power of Satan and death. When God sees them, his heart breaks with compassion for them. When people suffered under self-centered leaders like King Saul, God was deeply sorry. However, when a shepherd like King David cared for them, God was pleased. God said, "I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do" (Ac 13:22b). From David's line, God promised to send a Savior. With great compassion, God sent Jesus, his one and only Son, as our good Shepherd.

While on earth, Jesus cared for many people with compassion. Once a man with leprosy came to Jesus, crying for help. Leprosy was contagious like Covid, but far more serious; lepers were quarantined for life. No one dared be near the man for their own protection. However, Jesus was filled with compassion for him. Jesus reached out his hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be clean." The man was completely healed. Then there was Matthew, a selfish tax collector. No one wanted to associate with him. Yet Jesus called him as his disciple out of great compassion. For this reason, Jesus was severely criticized by the religious leaders. But Jesus did not mind, as long as Matthew could be transformed. The stories of Jesus' compassion are numerous. Finally, in his great compassion, Jesus went to the cross and gave his life as a ransom for our sins. Jesus' motive as our good Shepherd was always compassion for the needy. This is what Jesus really wants his disciples to learn from him--not just his ministry skills, but his compassion.

We need to see people with compassion, especially young people. On the outside they may look okay. But their hearts are filled with agonies. My son Daniel, a young man of 18, has already experienced the death of three peers, two by murder and one by a drug overdose. He struggles hard to stand on gospel truth, especially Jesus' resurrection, and to be a friend to his peers. So many young people are suffering from injustice and abandonment. They are like sheep without a shepherd. We cannot turn a deaf ear to the inner cries. They need Jesus, our Savior and Shepherd. Jesus calls us all, young and old, to have compassion on them and serve them as shepherds.

Out of his great compassion, what did Jesus do practically for the people? First of all, he began teaching them many things (34b). To Jesus, their main problem was spiritual oblivion: they did not know God. Jesus must have taught about the one true God, the Creator from Genesis. Jesus taught the purpose of life and how to be fruitful. Jesus taught the certainty of final judgment and our eternal destiny: heaven or hell. Jesus taught how to receive forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and God's kingdom. The words of God give life to our souls, true meaning, hope and vision. That is why Jesus taught the word of God diligently, persistently, and faithfully.

Out of his compassion, Jesus also fed the people (35-44). While Jesus was teaching with great zeal, the sun began to set, and the sky was turning purplish pink. Jesus was going on and on, showing no sign of stopping. The disciples began to wonder if Jesus had lost touch with reality. So they said, "This is a remote place, and it's already very late. Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat" (35-36). They seem mindful, and their suggestion appears reasonable. But Jesus did not agree with them. He said, "You give them something to eat" (37a). What surprising words! They are a direct challenge to the innate selfishness of his disciples. Why did Jesus give this command? Jesus wanted them to change from self-centered people to compassionate people. Moreover, he wanted them to think and act with faith, not just human reason. In short, Jesus trained them to be shepherds.

How did they respond? They said to him, "That would take more than half a year's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?" (37b) They first thought about the cost, and then about the logistical challenge of finding bread in that remote place. Accordingly, they concluded it was impossible. Then they became negative and rebellious. Jesus was not discouraged. Rather, he helped them obey his command, saying, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see" (38). Upon hearing this, they repented their rebellious attitude and obeyed Jesus' word to go and see. They found five loaves and two fish. It was almost nothing. But they brought it to Jesus by faith. Jesus' command, "You give them something to eat," may sound overwhelming to us. But his words "go and see," help us to find something to offer to Jesus. This is the first step in participating in Jesus' great work. What can we offer? It may be one-to-one Bible study, prayer for the sick, or serving meals to the hungry. As we prepare for the World Mission Report, it may be translating a testimony or leading a group Bible study. Jesus does not ask for what we do not have, but to go and see what we do have. Mother Teresa said, "We cannot all do great things. But we can do small things with great love." When we offer what we have, God blesses it.

When the disciples brought what they had, though it was tiny, Jesus did not dismiss it. Jesus took what they brought and began to work. He directed his disciples to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass (39). He wanted them to participate in his work. They simply trusted Jesus and made a good environment (40). Then Jesus took the five loaves and the two fish and looked up to heaven. He gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all (41). In this act, Jesus revealed himself as God incarnate. For God, who created all things out of nothing, feeding a large crowd with five loaves and two fish was no problem. Everything is possible with God. This encourages us to live beyond our human limits by trusting God's great power. As the great missionary William Carey said, we can attempt great things for God, expecting great things from God.

What happened? The large crowd of five thousand men, plus women and children, ate as much as they wanted and were satisfied. It was so delicious. The disciples went and picked up twelve basketfuls of leftovers (42-44). Jesus is God who can fully meet the needs of all humankind. Yet he did so by working together with his disciples. In the same way, God calls us to work with him to fulfill his great commission to make disciples of all nations by raising many young people as Jesus' disciples. Of course, by ourselves we can do nothing. But when we hear Jesus' words, "You give them something to eat," and, "go and see," and offer what we have to Jesus by faith, he will bless us and work mightily through us.

Second, Jesus shepherds his disciples (45-56). After feeding the five thousand, immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd (45). Then Jesus went up on a mountainside to pray (46). It is easy for

us to become complacent after a great event. But Jesus went to the Father in prayer. Through prayer Jesus found new strength and wisdom. Even though he missed a vacation, he was fully strengthened through fellowship with God.

Later that night, the boat was in the middle of the lake (47). The exhausted disciples were straining at the oars without making progress, because the wind was against them. Their sense of victory and joy from experiencing a great miracle dissipated and they began to feel powerless, helpless, and fearful. They could no longer see Jesus. However, Jesus saw them and understood their situation. He went out to them, walking on the lake. Jesus overruled natural law by his supernatural power. The winds and waves could not hinder Jesus as he demonstrated divine mastery over the elements. He moved so quickly through the wind and waves that he was about to pass by his struggling disciples. At first, they perceived some unusual movement on the water. As the moonlight reflected on Jesus, they sensed it was a human form and thought it was a ghost. They were terrified and cried out (48-50a). Immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid" (50b). Jesus' words assuaged their fear and filled them with new strength. They found that Jesus was with them. They did not need to be afraid of anything. As soon as Jesus got into the boat, the wind died down (51a). When we want to serve Jesus, we face winds of resistance. It is easy to forget that our mighty God, Jesus, is with us. We become fearful and lose strength and cannot help ourselves, let alone serve others. But even when we do not see Jesus, Jesus is still with his people. Jesus has promised, "I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Mt 28:20).

The disciples were completely amazed (51b). Why? The author Mark comments, "...for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened" (52). This means that they should have understood that Jesus is God through feeding the crowd. They should have trusted Jesus and lived by faith. But when confronting a challenge, they forgot everything. They were overwhelmed by their situation. Jesus wants us to always remember what he has done and who he is. Jesus is God: ever present, all knowing, and almighty. When this Jesus is with us, we have victory and peace. Then we can have room in our hearts to be shepherds for others in any situation.

Verses 53-56 tell how Jesus' Galilean ministry concluded at Gennesaret. Wherever Jesus went, people from the whole region ran after him. They carried the sick on mats and reached out their hands to just touch the edge of his cloak by faith. And all who touched him were healed. This tells us how much people needed Jesus. Jesus shepherded such people wherever he went. Though Jesus is almighty God, he did not exercise authority like a worldly king. Rather, out of great compassion, he humbled himself and served all kinds of people according to their need.

I first heard Jesus' words, "You give them something to eat," in the early 1980's. They have remained in my heart and challenged me to change from a selfish person to a

shepherd for God's flock. As I have offered what I have to Jesus: giving the word of God to the lost, feeding a hungry person, visiting someone in prison, visiting other countries with messages, God's power has transformed me to grow in his compassion. Now there are people throughout Chicago, the USA and around the world who are receiving grace through my ministry. Still, I need to grow. Through this message, 1 Peter 5:2a came to my heart, "Be shepherds of God's flock." Accordingly, I pray to live as a compassionate shepherd for God's people. God who is changing me can change anyone. Let us pray to learn God's compassion and live as shepherds for needy people. God will surely bless us and make us a blessing.