



Roanoke, Virginia

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“Reimagined: Meal”

Part IV of the Sermon Series “Reimagined.”

Mark 6:30-44

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For our scripture reading today, we jump ahead a bit in Mark. We have reimagined baptism and call from chapter 1 and reimagined house as we looked at the dinner at Levi’s house in chapter 2. Today we jump to chapter 6. If you are following along in our Mark reading, you are anxiously waiting to get to chapter 5 and 6 this week. Listen now to a miracle of a meal in Mark 6:30-44 and listen for God’s word:

³⁰ The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹ He said to them, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves 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 deserted place by themselves. ³³ Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. ³⁴ As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. ³⁵ When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, “This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; ³⁶ send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat.” ³⁷ But he answered them, “You give them something to eat.” They said to him, “Are we to 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 have you? Go and see.” When they had found out, they said, “Five, and two fish.” ³⁹ Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green



grass. ⁴⁰ So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. ⁴¹ Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. ⁴² And all ate and were filled; ⁴³ and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. ⁴⁴ Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.

Who takes a lunch break? Who in here actually stops working, and I mean shuts the computer down, turns off the phone, leaves your workspace, and takes a break? In recent years, lunch breaks have been diminished to quick bites and mindless eating, and often times lunch breaks are not even taken.

North Americans are famously overworked. A study by the US Travel Association found that in 2018, Americans took an average of 17.4 vacation days, leaving 768 million vacation days unused and on the table, an increase of 9% from 2017.¹ And that's even if they were lucky enough to have vacation days at all—the US has the distinct honor (or should I say dishonor) as being the only country in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development that doesn't guarantee a single day of federally mandated paid time off. And this overworking mentality bleeds into the workday itself. 62% of Americans say they eat lunch at their desk.² And I assume it is not unplugged and disconnected.

This overworking has been compounded in the past year with more Americans working from home. And research shows we are spending an extra 48.5 minutes more at work each day,³ attending more meetings and navigating more emails for more of our day. However, this is not to say that lunch at work or even at your desk is entirely terrible. Lunch spent at your desk video chatting with a friend, reading your favorite book or online article, watching videos that bring you joy, or even rewatching your favorite sermons, these are all great things to do. Because you are making a choice in how you spend your lunch break. The issue lies in the fact that we, as a culture, have idolized work and have condemned idleness. Going for a midday walk, taking time for yourself, not attending the “optional” lunch event for the fifth day in a row, eating outside by yourself—all of these have been branded as selfish and lazy. And one of the main culprits of setting up this lunch-break uneasiness is the corporate culture set by managers.

Perhaps we should first consider how the rhythm of work and rest Jesus demonstrates throughout his earthly ministry calls us to reconsider the rhythm of our days. Thus far in our reading in Mark, we have seen Jesus find solitude and rest in isolation. Jesus works, heals, preaches, and teaches, but then finds time in between to disengage, to step away and pray. Our reading for today begins with the disciples returning from being hard at work since they were appointed in

¹ U.S. Travel Association, *Study: A Record 768 Million U.S. Vacation Days Went Unused in '18, Opportunity Cost in the Billions* Press Release: August 6, 2019. Oct. 1, 2021. <https://www.ustravel.org/press/study-record-768-million-us-vacation-days-went-unused-18-opportunity-cost-billions>

² *Failure to Lunch* accessed Oct. 1, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/28/magazine/failure-to-lunch.html>

³ National Bureau of Economic Research. *Collaborating During Coronavirus: The Impact of COVID-19 on the Nature of Work*, accessed Oct. 1, 2021. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w27612>



chapter 3 and sent earlier in this chapter. The disciples were sent out taking with them nothing but a staff, proclaiming that all should repent, casting out demons, anointing the sick with oil and curing them. Some time passed (we are not told exactly how long), but now they are reunited with Jesus. And instead of getting back to work now as a reformed group, Jesus calls them away. The disciples have worked hard; now they are called to rest. They have worked so hard they barely have had time to eat—they have not been taking their lunch breaks. Jesus sees this and, like a good manager or team leader, he knows they need rest. They head for a deserted place, presumably on the other side of the lake, to find rest—to take time to recharge their bodies and souls and reconnect with each other after their apostolic mission. They make their way to the other side but the crowds who were following Jesus and his team have beat them there.

We all know disruptions happen. We all know interruptions are part of our everyday life. When Jesus and his disciples reach the shore of the other side of the lake, the restful plans Jesus had were disrupted. And interruptions happen quite a bit during Jesus' ministry. But instead of becoming angry and frustrated, Jesus was overcome with compassion. The word here is a deep churning of the intestines. The root refers to the inward parts of the body, the guts, and became to figuratively refer to deep emotions. Jesus was moved in the inward parts of the body, a physical and emotional response in seeing the crowd. This is like hunger and butterflies coupled with a deep sense of love for those interrupting him—"They were like sheep without a shepherd." This compassion is more than pity as some translations have it. Compassion is a sense of shared suffering. Jesus understood, felt and took on their feelings of shepherdless wondering.

Jesus responded to this intestinal churning of compassion, and he cared for them, teaching them many things. As night came, the crowd felt an intestinal churning, not of compassion, but of hunger. The disciples saw the physical need of the crowd and wanted to send them away to find food. But Jesus looks at them and says, "You give them something to eat." With only five loaves and two fish, the disciples were perplexed. How will this feed all of them? And Jesus ordered the crowd to recline on the green pasture, took the five loaves, gave thanks to God, and handed them back to the disciples. "You give them something to eat." The disciples then fed the crowd. The disciples were the ones who took the food to the people. Jesus only began the process. It was the disciples who saw it through.

What I see in the example of Jesus and his disciples, is a call to take our lunch breaks. What I hear in this is a reminder to be present in the moments of meals. There will be days when our work is overwhelming, as it was for the disciples and for Jesus. But in the moments of a meal, recline in the green pastures of idleness, the green pastures of our Lord who taught us earlier that Sabbath was created for man, not man for the Sabbath. Recline, find good company to sit with, to reconnect with, and after giving thanks for the food before you, share the meal.

Growing up our schedules were busy, with club soccer, school soccer, church meetings, board meetings, youth group, and so on. There were days we were eating on the run. But what I remember most as a child is waiting for the whole family to gather around a shared meal at our



dinner table. The television was turned off, our phones put up (well we didn't have cell phones really) or at least we would not answer the house phone if it rang, we would sing our blessing each night, and we would dine as a family.

Being present with others at the table is a moment of compassion in and of itself, a moment to really share experiences and understand one another on a deeper level. It is a setting for conversation, for sharing the wonder of daily miracles, for telling stories of God's faithfulness. A feeling of warmth and belonging.

Maybe meals are not only times to eat, but are times to be fed—physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

If in your workdays, your school days, or your nights at home, you have the urge to eat and run, perhaps remember Jesus' example and commands in this passage: step away from the busyness of work and life; find a moment of solitude with others to recharge and reconnect; recline together, sit down together; make the meal a shared experience, because you don't have to do it all by yourself; give thanks for all that is before you (the food and the people); enjoy simplicity; be fed but waste nothing; experience the miracle of community, the miracle of God's goodness and the love of Christ that multiplies.

The feeding of the 5000 is not the only miracle of the story. There is a miracle of awareness and awakening that occurs because of the meal. The way I see it, through the meal the crowd is brought closer to the divine compassion that we are to emulate. Through the meal the crowd is drawn into the reality and knowledge of a Savior that is present in their suffering and extends all that he has for them to be nourished and satisfied. Through the meal we glimpse the grace that is never earned but freely given. It is the miracle of the meal that we join each other in a moment of shared circumstance.

Perhaps, our meals might go beyond the physical activity of eating or feeding. It is the miracle of a meal that gathers us together. By reimagining meals as an experience of the divine in community, our meals might look more like this great banquet—a meal where all are welcome, just as they are, just as you are, a meal to remember and do, a meal of thanksgiving, a meal to give and a meal to be fed. A meal where our Savior is present, seated beside you, forever extending compassion and love.

May it be so. Amen.

