

Mark 8:1-21 – “Remember”  
FBC, January 5, 2020

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The text we just read from the Gospel According to Mark,  
is a most appropriate text for the first Sunday of a new year.

It is definitely an appropriate text

in which, or, out of which,

to begin a new year numbered 2020.

For in the text,

and especially through the questions Jesus asks,

our Lord is working  
to improve our vision,  
our vision of reality.

He is working to give us 2020 vision  
with which to move into the year 2020.

If you have read the four Gospels,  
you know that Jesus does much of His  
disciple-making  
through questions.

Asking questions,  
at first a seemingly harmless exercise,  
turns out to be a powerfully  
subversive form of teaching.

Someone (I think it was Samuel Johnson) said:

“Asking questions is not an acceptable  
mode of conversation among gentlemen.”

For questions have a way of sneaking around barriers  
that even the clearest declaration cannot penetrate.

“Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread?”

“Do you have eyes but fail see, and ears but fail to hear?”

“ Do you not remember?”

“Do you still not understand?”

I hear Jesus asking those question of me and you today.

And do you know how I respond?

No.

I do not yet remember  
as clearly as I want to remember.

And, no.

I do not yet understand  
as fully as I want to understand.

Although Jesus’ questions might initially  
cause the disciples and us

to feel ashamed,  
that is not His primary intent in asking them.

His primary intent is to unmask the unbelief

that lies at the root of the anxiety that marks our lives.

His primary intent is to wake us up!

“Be on guard,”

Jesus says to the disciples on the boat.

Or, “watch out!”

“Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread?”

Well, that is the fact – we have no bread.

Or, at least, only one loaf for thirteen men.

“Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear?”

See what?

Hear what?

“Do you not remember?”

Remember what?

So much has happened since we started following You.

Remember what?

“Do you still not understand?”

Understand what?

Now, it is important to observe

that Jesus does not address the questions

to the not-yet-believing world.

Jesus does not expect the world

to see and remember and understand.

Given the truncated and blurred  
vision of reality of most of the world,  
people can only see the fact of “no bread.”

But Jesus does expect His disciples  
to see and remember and understand.  
Because of our encounter with Him,  
the Light of the world,  
the church’s vision of reality is clearer,  
or, ought to be.

“Do you have eyes but fail to see?  
Do you have ears but fail to hear?”

They are crossing the Sea of Galilee.

Something they have done many times before with Jesus.  
And apparently this crossing of the waters  
was going to take some time.  
For the disciples began to check out the supplies on board,  
in particular to find out if they had enough food.

They discover that  
they had forgotten to bring along any bread.

Someone did find one loaf,

but what was that for thirteen hungry men?

I can imagine the spirited dialogue that ensued!

“I thought you were in charge of bring snacks.”

“No, you were!”

“No, Peter said you and James were.”

“That was on the last trip.”

“Now what are we going to do?”

“No bread; mercy on us, no bread.”

“Why are you talking about having no bread?”

“Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod.”

The amazing thing about their panic,

is that on the boat with them is a Man

Who had just taken seven small loaves of bread

and multiplied them to feed four thousand men,

plus their wives and children!

And not long before that great act,

He has taken five small loaves of bread,

and multiplied them to feed five thousand men,

plus their wives and children!

One of the facts about the four Gospels

that give them what C.S. Lewis referred to

as “the ring of truth,”

is the Gospel writers’ realistic portrait of Jesus’ first disciples.

None of the four writers –

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John –

idealizes those men and women.

Mark in particular is not afraid to “tell it like it is.”

Even though by this time the disciples

had witnessed and experienced mighty acts

of healing and deliverance and provision,

they still suffered from significant degrees

of spiritual blindness and deafness;

they were still blind and deaf

to the whole of reality.

Hearts and minds so preoccupied with  
their own human resources,  
or lack thereof,

that they were unaware of the inexhaustible resources  
of the One Who  
was sitting in the boat with them.

Know anyone like that?

Anyone see yourself in those disciples?

I certainly do!

Is not Mark's portrait of those first disciples

a portrait of the church of Jesus Christ throughout the ages?

Like them we have gotten in the boat with the Lord of Life.

Like them we too are aware

that the human resources on the boat

are simply not enough to meet the needs all around us.

I am alarmed at how quickly things are changing.

Or, as I should say, collapsing.

The moral order of our societies  
unraveling at an alarming rate.

The political order  
fraught with self-seeking and corruption.

The increasing use of guns to solve arguments.

Drug and alcohol addiction  
at ever greater levels in our city's life.

Internet pornography  
capturing more and more each day.

Child and spousal abuse rates off the charts.

People not finding enough to eat,  
going to bed on the streets.

The list goes on and on.

The not-yet-believing world, of course,

focuses on the fact of “no bread,” or, “only one loaf.”

And the church?

Where does the church focus?

Jesus asks us:

“Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread?”

“Do you not see? Do you not hear?”

“Do you not remember?”

“Do you not yet understand?”

Jesus had been warning the disciples.

“Watch out!” He was saying.

More than friendly advice.

It is a command.

“Watch out!”

“Beware!”

“Beware the yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod.”



Jesus could see it beginning to bubble up in His disciples.

“Yeast,” or “leaven.”

The word Mark uses refers to the kind of yeast

that causes fermentation in the making of bread.

[David McKenna, *Mark*, 170].

*It refers to a substance,*

*which although very small compared to the whole,*

*nevertheless affects the whole.*

“The yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod,” Jesus calls it.

Something in their hearts and minds,

which although seemingly small and insignificant

affects the whole of their lives.

What was that something?

The clue is found in the fact

that Jesus speaks of

the Pharisees and Herod in the same sentence.

In the 1<sup>st</sup> century one could not find  
two more extreme opposites.

Herod despised the Pharisees.

And the Pharisees hated Herod.

Yet Jesus speaks of them in the same sentence.

Because although they were so different,  
they had something in common.

“Yeast.”

The same yeast that affected their whole lives.

What was the yeast?

Human self-sufficiency.

Both extremes put their hope for the future  
in what they themselves could do.

Both extremes put their hope for the future  
in their own wisdom and power.

Both extremes were pre-occupied with themselves  
and with their resources.

And it slowly dulled their ears,

And blinded their eyes

to the real Presence of the Living God.

They did not realize that Immanuel had come!

The same yeast manifested itself in both  
the political and religious spheres of life.

As it does today.

Both spheres insensitive to Divine Reality.

Herod was the Jewish King

who ruled the land of Israel on behalf of the Romans.

Which is why the Pharisees hated him so much.

He was, in their minds, a traitor,

one of their own who supported the foreign oppressors.

Herod was enamored with his own status

and the military might of Rome.

He had great confidence in the power of government.

So pre-occupied was he with what the State could do,

that became hardened to any Higher Power.

“Watch out!” Jesus exhorts us.

The same yeast also worked its spell in the Pharisees.

Oh, the Pharisees regularly spoke of God.

They read the Psalms that call us to put our trust in God.

In God alone.

They were zealous for God's law.

So am I.

So are you, I trust.

But when all was said and done,

their confidence lay in their own goodness,

in their own abilities,

in their own sufficiency.

Yes, that daily exercised the outward forms of spirituality.

But in their daily lives

they lived as if it was all up to them.

All they saw in Jesus,

God-made-flesh,

was a threat to their goodness and power.

And for all their claims

of trusting God to bring about justice,

they looked to the political realm to make it happen.

Imagine that:

religious people trusting the political realm.

So much so that they,  
on the one hand comprised  
their religious convictions,  
and on the other hand partnered  
with corrupt politicians.

“Watch out!” says Jesus.

The yeast was especially manifested

in their demand that Jesus give them a sign.

They wanted some sort of miraculous proof  
to substantiated His teachings.

Goodness gracious!

They had already sign many signs!

They had already seen Jesus

heal the sick,

cast out demons,

raise the dead (!).

“Show us a sign!”

But Jesus would not.

Why?

Their hearts were so hardened  
one more sign would make no difference.

They would dismiss it too,  
and demand another sign.

And another.

So insensitive to the Presence of the Living God  
did the Pharisees become  
that they joined hands with Herod,  
a man who embodied  
none of what the Pharisees knew  
was to mark a leader who pleases God.

They joined hands with their hated enemy  
to get rid of Jesus!

“Watch out!” He says to us.

In the disciples’ anxiety on the boat,

Jesus spots the same yeast.

On the boat with them is the One Who can meet the crisis.

And where to they turn?

To Jesus?

No!

They turn to themselves,  
to their own resources.

The yeast of self-sufficiency was fermenting in their souls.

And they did not see.

They did not remember.

“Watch out!” says the Lord and Lover of our souls.

So Jesus went to work on their hardened hearts.

He did not blast away.

He chipped away.

By asking questions.

“Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread?”

“Do you not yet see or hear?”

“Do you not remember?”

Ah, remember!

That is the key.

The disciples lacked insight and understanding

in that “no bread” crisis

because they failed to remember.

So Jesus reminds them by asking more questions!

“When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand,  
 how many baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up?”

“Twelve,” they answer.

“And when I broke the seven loaves for the seven thousand,  
 how many baskets full of pieces did you pick up?”

“Seven,” they replied.

“Do you not yet understand?”

Jesus could have asked other question  
 to trigger the memory and fuel faith.

For example,  
 the story Mark tells just before the one  
 we are in this morning.

“When I encountered the man who was deaf  
 and had trouble speaking.

What did I do?”

“You put Your fingers into his ears.”

“And?”

“Your spit and touched his tongue.”

“And?”

“You looked heaven ward, and said,

‘Ephphatha!’, “Be opened.”



“And”

“His eyes were opened, and his tongue loosed.”

“Do you not yet understand?”

Or Jesus could have asked:

“Do you remember the last time we were out here on the sea?”

The wind stirred up such a storm

that the waves were crashing over the sides,

filling this very boat with water.”

“And?”

“And we woke You up, crying, ‘Master, we are perishing!’”.

“And?”

“You woke up and spoke to the winds and waves.”

“And?”

“They obeyed.”

“Do you not yet understand?”

Or Jesus could have asked:

“Do you not remember when we went to the house of Jarius,

and found his daughter dead?’

“Remember what happened?”

“You took the girl by the hand and said,

‘Talitha kum!’

“Little girl, get up!”

“And?”

“She did. She rose up and began to walk.”

“Do you not yet understand?”

Or Jesus could have asked:

“Remember the times we encounter people  
who were being held by the demonic?”

“Remember what happened?”

“You did not back away in fear.”

“And?”

“You faced the demonic and spoke.”

“Spoke what?”

“Be gone!”

“And?”

“The agents of evil let go.”

“Do you not yet understand?”

One more.

Jesus could have taken them all the back to His first miracle.

He could have asked:

“Remember the time we went to a wedding in Cana of Galilee?”

“Yes.”

“What happened?”

“The couple being married ran out of wine.”

“And?”

“You told the head-waiter to fill the water pots with water.”

“And with grapes?”

“No, You said nothing about grapes.”

“And what happened to water?”

“You made it into the finest of wines.”

“Without grapes, right?”

“Yes, just water.”

“The ingredients for the wine were not there in the water pots.”

“Right.”

“Yet, wine flowed from the water without grapes.”

“Yes.”

“Do you not yet understand?”

Jesus is telling the disciples and us

that it is failing to remember

that leads to anxiety and worry.

That certainly was the case with Israel of the OT.

Remember?

Events Jesus clearly has in mind in Mark 8.

The Living God has rescued the Jews

from the unjust Pharaoh of Egypt.

What an act of power and mercy!

Then just a few days after that act,

the redeemed people find themselves without water.

In the wilderness without water.

A major crisis.

And what did the people do?

Look to their Redeemer?

No!

They “grumbled and complained” as the Exodus text puts it!

They looked to themselves and their resources,

and “grumbled and complained.”

Yet, out of mercy and grace

God provided water and sweet manna from heaven.

Then a new crisis arose.

And did they this time turn to God?

No!

They panicked again.

They had forgotten!

The yeast was fermenting.

That is why Moses exhorted the people over and over again,

“Remember!”

(Deuteronomy 32:7, ect.).

Remember what God has already done!

Remember Who God is!

Part of the reason for the various Jewish feasts –

Passover, Tabernacles, Pentecost –

was to keep memory alive.

The people would recite the stories  
of the mighty deeds of God,

to keep those deeds  
at the forefront of their consciousness.

That is why we gather here Sunday after Sunday.

To keep memory alive.

Together reminding ourselves of God's mighty acts  
in Israel and in Jesus.

Remember.

Sociologist Os Guinness makes a sobering observation.

In his book,  
*In Two Minds: The Dilemma of Doubt and How to Resolve It*,

he writes:

“... rebellion against God  
does not begin with the clinched fist of atheism  
but with the self-satisfied heart of the one  
for whom ‘thank you’ is redundant” (71-72).

When we fail to remember,

“What God has done fades slowly out of the picture,  
and we focus increasingly on what our resources  
seem able to do” (70).

And slowly, but surely,

our hearts harden.

And we become insensitive to

the Presence and Power of the Living God.

“Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread?”

“Do you have a hardened heart?”

“Do you have eyes but do not see, ears but do not hear?”

“Do you not remember?”

“Do you not yet understand?”

“Watch out!”

“Remember.”

“Understand.”

Understand what?

Remember so that we understand what?

1. That He really is for us.

That is why He is in the boat with us.

He, after all, called them to follow Him onto the sea.

That, after all, is why we are where we are.

He is with us and for us.

“Do you not yet see ME in your circumstance?”

2. And He wants to understand the He is able.

We may not be able.

But He is.

Look at all He has done! Overcoming huge obstacles!

3. And He wants us to understand that He is able

to do much with little.

Five loaves – feed 5,000.

Seven loaves – feed 4,000.

No grapes, just water – finest of wine.

Jesus is the great multiplier.

He wants us to understand His math – do much with little.

4. And He wants us to understand Who He is.

To see beyond the miracles to the Miracle Maker.

To see beyond the loaves and leftovers  
to the Bread of Life Himself.

To see beyond the suffering of the cross

to the salvation of the world.

To see in the empty tomb to the victory over death.

To see that death is no match for Him

Who is the Resurrection and the Life.



“Why do you discuss the fact  
that you lack the strength to go on?

Why do you discuss the fact  
that you have nothing to bring  
to the crisis of the world?

You have ME!”

ME!

You have Me!

“Do you not remember?”

A new song making the rounds in churches around the world  
is ringing in my ears.

“Waymaker,  
Miracle Worker,  
Promise Keeper,  
Light in the darkness ...  
my God, that is Who You are!”

THAT is Who is in the boat with us!

Now, here is the good news about this encounter in the boat.

Even though He calls me to remember

I do not have to remember it all  
for it all to be true.

Even though He calls me to understand

I do not have to understand it all

for it all to be true.

He IS all that He claims to be

apart from me remembering and understanding

And better yet.

Even if one day I am no longer able to remember any of it,

it will all still be true.

Even if one day I am no longer able to understand any of it,

it will all still be true.

My lack of memory or understanding

does not change the reality.

I no longer have the mental capacity I once had.

There was a time when

you could simply speak a line from the Bible

and I could tell you chapter and verse.

Not now.

My memory is not what it once was.

But that does not change the truth.

The truth will still be true  
even if I loose more capacity to remember it.

What was true before I started to understand  
will be true should I no longer understand.

You know the name Nancy Regan.

A regal woman who died a few years ago.

For 50 years she was married to Ronald Regan,  
former President of the United States.

She so lovingly cared for him

when after leaving the While House

he developed severe Dementia and Alzheimer's.

Before Mrs. Regan died,

she told a story

to former Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney,

who shared it in an interview with the National Post.

[Vancouver Sun, 3-7-16]

The Regans were leaving a packed restaurant

in the Bel-Air suburb of Los Angeles.

All the other diners stood and gave an impromptu ovation.

Ronald turned to Nancy and asked,

“What is this about?”

Nancy replied,

“Well, Ronny, this is for you.”

He asked,

“Why for me?”

“Because,” she said,

“you were the President of the United States.”

He looked at her, and said, “Is that so?”

How profoundly sad.

He was once the most powerful human being in the world,  
but he could no longer remember being so.

But his loss of memory did not change the reality.

It was so even when he no longer understood it to be so.

“Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread?”

“Do you not remember?”

Is it any surprise that the Lord Jesus  
should make eating and drinking at His Table  
the central act of Christian worship?  
He knows us.  
He knows how easily we forget.  
So He sets a Table before us  
right in the midst of all the challenge and struggle.  
And says,  
“Do this in remembrance of Me.”  
Do this so that you remember  
Who is in the boat with you.  
So that you move into the year 2020 with 2020 vision.