



## THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Study Guide Full  
Mark 6:30-44  
November 10, 2019

A head on a platter: that is the literary context of this week's Markan passage of the feeding of the 5,000. The cost of discipleship for the twelve disciples, and us by extension, could hardly be starker than the murder of John the Baptist.

Yet, if we are prone to dismay before such a cost, Mark returns to a meal to remind us of whom we serve: Jesus Christ, who is himself Yahweh, the God who formed a people out of the wilderness of Egyptian slavery to be their good shepherd leading them to green pasture. So it is that when we are sent out to serve by his word and his power, *we see his economy of miraculous multiplication.*



*The Miracle of the Bread  
and the Fish*  
Giovanni Lanfranco  
1620s  
(commons.wikimedia.org)

30 *The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. 31 And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place 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 desolate place by themselves.

## Mark 6:30-44

Notes:

33 Now many saw them going and  
recognized them, and they ran there on  
foot from all the towns and got there ahead of  
them. 34 When he went ashore he saw a great  
crowd, and he had compassion on them, because  
they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began  
to teach them many things. 35 And when it grew late, his  
disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place,  
and the hour is now late. 36 Send them away to go into the  
surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves  
something to eat." 37 But he answered them, "You give  
them something to eat." And they said to him, "Shall we 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  
do you have? Go and see." And when they had found out,  
they said, "Five, and two fish." 39 Then he commanded them  
all to sit down in groups on the green grass. 40 So they sat  
down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. 41 And taking  
the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and  
said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the  
disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two  
fish among them all. 42 And they all ate and were satisfied.  
43 And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and  
of the fish. 44 And those who ate the loaves were five thou-  
sand men.

### Commentary Notes:

**vv. 30-31.** As Mark resumes his account of the mission of the twelve, after the flashback interruption of the murder of John the Baptist, he begins by noting the incredible level of interest in the gospel: the disciples' faithful response to Jesus' sending means that they can't even find time to grab a meal!

### Discussion Questions:

*Meditate:* How are you in need of rest with Jesus this week? Sit quietly with this question for a few minutes, and then share.

So then does Jesus invite them to the respite of a “desert/desolate place”.

Keep in mind that the Greek in verse 31 for “leisure” is the same word root for “opportunity” in 6:21 — εὐκαιρουν (*eukairoun*). It is a rare word in the NT, only used two other times. Clearly, Mark wants to tie together this feeding with the “feeding” that has come before in the macabre murder-banquet of Herod.

**vv. 32-33.** Through the gospel, Jesus has repeatedly needed to get away from the crowds. Such is the case here. Yet, rather than feeling frustrated or annoyed, he responds here with great compassion, “teaching them many things,” as only the most patient of teachers would do. The image of this compassionate shepherd-teacher would have called to mind a number of Old Testament images, including Psalm 23, Ezekiel 34, and Numbers 27.

**vv. 34-35.** The “desolate”/“quiet” place is literally a “desert place,” Ἐρημός...τόπος (*Eremos topos*) a land apart from cultivation, from human control. Perceiving and concerned for the crowd’s hunger, they look to send the many away.

**Study:** Briefly review what we studied last week in the murder-banquet of Herod, noting Mark’s repetition of the rare Greek word for “opportunity” in 6:21 and 6:31 — εὐκαιρουν (*eukairoun*) (see commentary note). If this feeding of the 5,000 text is an opportunity for life and restoration, what was the previous text an “opportunity” for? How would you summarize last week’s text of the death of John the Baptist?

**Pray:** Pray that your Connection Group’s Spirit-led attempts to live as ones sent out to the neighbourhood would generate the interest in the gospel shown here.

**Study:** Read Ezekiel 34:1-16, verses speaking of Yahweh himself as the true shepherd of the sheep. What are the failures of the shepherds of Israel revealed in these verses? How do you see some of the sins of Herod Antipas and Herodias, from last week’s text, reflected in these failures?

**Pray:** Pray through Psalm 23 in deep, meditative fashion. Have one individual read one verse, and then pray out of and over that verse in line with your own personal needs. Then reread the verse. Now move onto the next verse, and repeat the liturgy.

**Discuss:** How do you think the disciples would have felt, having expected to go away and find respite, but being called back into ministry?

**Discuss:** Considering all the disciples have seen throughout Mark’s gospel, should they have been able to presume that Jesus could feed the crowd?

vv. 37-38. By the word of Jesus—even in an uncultivated place—the disciples are to provide for the crowd’s hunger. The emphatic Greek pronoun (Δότε... ὑμεῖς) makes unmistakable Jesus’ message: “You *yourselves* give them to eat.”

Mark’s gospel is the only text to note the denarii amount. 200 denarii represented about eight months of an average worker’s salary at the time. As it would have been impossible for the disciples to carry around that much money, their response “Shall we go and buy 200 denarii worth of bread” likely carries sarcastic overtones. Mark thus seems to highlight their incomprehension of God’s economy.

vv. 38-41. Jesus commands the crowds to sit down—literally, divided into dinner parties (*symposia*), and organized into plots (*prasia*). *Prasia* actually means “garden beds,” and the subtext seems to be one of a new creation, a reminder of the garden of Eden—a picture of flowering, out of the desolate desert experience.

Note also that the loaves likely echo Isaiah 49:9-10, where we read that in the new exodus God’s people will not hunger.

vv. 42-44. “King” Herod’s meal results in murder; *King* Jesus’ meal results in miraculous multiplication, with the number of leftover baskets matching the disciples’ (and Israel tribes’) number—12!

*Confess:* When have you believed the size of your need to far outweigh the power of Christ? Search your heart, confessing and receiving afresh his forgiveness.

*Discern:* The compassion of Christ becomes manifest in the teaching and feeding that meets the needs of the crowd. In what ways in the next weeks can your Connection Group be demonstrating the compassion of Christ by meeting the needs of your neighbourhood in ways that reveal Christ’s love? In particular, consider, what are your “five loaves and two fish”—your *collective* resources and talents, which may be multiplied by the Lord to bless others? Ask the Spirit for direction in this regards.

*Encourage:* In what ways in the past have you seen the resources of God abundantly meet your needs, particularly when the needs seemed especially great? Encourage one another with your testimonies.

*Reflect:* Read Isaiah 49:8-11. Sit quietly over these verses for a few minutes. In what ways in the past has God lead you out of darkness to find good pasture, even on “barren hills”? Share with one another, if you feel comfortable.

*Listen:* End your time by listening to, and perhaps singing along with, Jeff Lawson and Sandra McCracken’s “Come To The Feast” (YouTube). In this moment, how is the Spirit speaking good news to you particularly?