

What Jesus Is Doing Is Extraordinary

The Seventh Sunday after Trinity

July 23, 2023

Mark 8:1–9

In the four Gospel accounts we see that the ministry of Jesus is extraordinary. His preaching was with power, He healed people, He raised them from the dead, He walked on water, and as we see in today's Gospel reading, He turned a few loaves of bread and a few fish into a lot of it to feed thousands of people. What He did was anything but ordinary.

But is this why Jesus came? Was He simply a miracle-worker? A closer look at how He carried out His ministry shows that He was also preparing His people for how He would continue to work in their lives. And how did He do that? It was through the ordinary. That's probably not what we're looking for. Why doesn't Jesus still come to us today and perform all those miracles He did back then? Why doesn't He show people today what He showed them 2000 years ago? Why doesn't He carry out miraculous actions when we're sick or struggling or doubting? He worked miraculously back then, why did He stop?

If we look carefully at what Jesus was doing in His ministry we see that His plan all along was not to work in our lives in extraordinary ways but very ordinary ways. Genesis 1 and 2 show us that in creating all things God gave us ordinary things for our daily living. Things like food. We need food to live. This was even before Adam and Eve fell into sin and thereby fell into death. Even living forever we were meant to live ordinary lives. God created everything perfectly and Adam and Eve walked and talked with God. They were in perfect communion with Him. This is how it was meant to be.

The warning in today's Old Testament reading to Adam was that of every tree he could eat except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, in the day he would eat of that he would die. In the Epistle reading Paul expresses that the death sin brings about is eternal death. We live and breathe, but because of our sin we will die eternally. He says that the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life. How is this gift given?

It is given to us in the ordinary. In telling the feeding of the four thousand Mark is not just showing that Jesus performed a miracle similar to when He fed the five thousand. There's more going on. Jesus is preparing for what He will do in our lives. How Mark introduces this story clues us in on this. Mark says that in those days there was again a large crowd. "In those days" is so matter of fact. It's like he is saying, "Oh, by the way, there was this time when there were a lot of people with Jesus and so Jesus did something miraculous." And He did. But He is also preparing His twelve disciples for when He will ascend into heaven and they will be carrying out the ministry as His apostles.

Jesus tells His disciples that He has compassion on the crowd because they have been with Him three days and they have nothing to eat. Jesus could have focused on the spiritual: "It's good that all these people don't have food because that would feed them only for a while. What they really need is the true food which feeds them for eternity." When Jesus was fasting for forty days in the wilderness He had this spiritual focus as He was tempted by the devil to turn stones into bread. Jesus told the devil that a person does not live by bread alone but by the Word of God. But you see, that's just it. He did not say that a person does not live by bread, but by bread *alone*. We need food, it's just that that's not enough. We actually live by food. But just not for eternity.

So Jesus has compassion on the thousands of people there. He wants to satisfy their hunger. He says that if He sends them away now some of them will faint on the way home because they have come from a long distance.

Jesus is specifically speaking to His twelve disciples. He is preparing them for what they will do when He is gone. So typical of them, they are clueless. “We’re out in this desolate place! Where are we supposed to get food for all these people!” It hadn’t been that long ago that Jesus had already taken a little bit of bread and a little bit of fish to feed many more thousands out in a desolate place. These men who don’t have a clue are the ones He is going to call to be His apostles and carry on the ministry when He departs this world.

Jesus takes the bread and gives thanks and then breaks it. Then notice what He does, He gives it to the disciples for them to hand out to the people. Jesus then blesses the fish and the disciples handed those out as well. This is one of the main things they will be doing when He leaves them, giving the people of God food for them to eat. But instead of bread and fish, they will give them bread and wine. Those thousands of people out there all eat and are satisfied. He feeds them so that they are ready to go.

And just as Mark began in a low-key way, he just as simply ends it, saying that Jesus dismissed them. It’s all over. He had taught them for three days. He now had fed them. Now they go home. Now they go back to their ordinary lives. This is, after all, why God created us. To live. To go about our lives. It’s not just doing stuff. It’s doing what God has given us to do. The easiest way to know what God has called you to do is to look at all the people in your life and all the many ways you serve them by caring for them and helping them and being there for them.

You are able to do this because of the very ordinary way Jesus works in your life, which is through teaching you and feeding you. As Jesus prepared them in His own ministry we see in the book of Acts His apostles carrying out their ministry. Jesus’ ministry was accompanied by miraculous actions, and so also was theirs. But as with Jesus, there was something more with theirs as well. There are brief remarks given in a couple of places in Acts where we are told the ordinary things they did. When the people of God would gather on the first day of the week they would hear the Word proclaimed and they would gather around the food Jesus had given to His apostles to then give to God’s people.

It was bread and wine. This bread was the bread that on the night when He was betrayed Jesus took and gave thanks for, blessed, broke, and gave to them saying that it was His very body. In the same way He took the cup and gave it to them with the words that it was His very blood which was shed for them. This is extraordinary. In giving them this bread and wine, Jesus knew that on the next day He would be giving over His body on the cross in sacrifice and shedding His blood for the sin of the world.

Do you think Jesus knew what He was doing out there in the desert on that day when He had compassion on those thousands of people? He specifically fed the people by giving the bread and fish to the disciples to hand out to the people. So very ordinary, which is what they needed. And so with the body and blood of Christ. It is given to you by the ministers of Christ, who continue in the ministry of the apostles. In ordinary bread and wine you are fed with the eternal food of the body and blood of Christ. What Jesus is doing is so very ordinary, feeding you each week with bread and wine and then dismissing you so that you may live your life and serve others. Yet this bread and wine is also extraordinary as it is His body and blood given and shed of your sins so that the life you live is eternal. Amen.

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