

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

Mark 6:30-44

Year B - Proper 11, Text: Mark 6:30-44
Year B - Proper 11, Text: Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

Today's pericope follows directly after the "flashback" retelling of John the Baptist's death.

Verse 6:30: This transitional verse reports the follow-up on the mission of the Twelve, here called "the apostles" for the only time in Mark. Mark usually calls them "the Twelve," or "the disciples" (but he has just used the latter term in v. 29 in reference to John's followers).

Mark's report on their activities is no more specific than that on the instructions Jesus gives them concerning the content of their preaching. The use of the word "taught" to describe the activities of anyone but Jesus is unique in the Gospels. The disciples usually "preach."

If the disciples had attempted to proclaim Jesus' teachings, it is unlikely that their efforts would have born much fruit, for Mark states throughout his writing that the disciples themselves did not really understand Jesus' message.

Verse 6:31: Matthew describes Jesus' call to the disciples to go with Him to a place away from the crowds as a result of His learning of John the Baptist's death. Not so in Mark, where the decision to travel is based on an invitation to enjoy some nourishment and rest.

Verse 6:32: The precise destination is not stated; perhaps it was the secluded northeast corner of the Sea of Galilee. It would have been inconvenient and difficult for the crowds to cross the bars of silt near the mouth of the River Jordan at certain times of the year.

Verse 6:33: However, the crowds observe what is taking place, hurry overland, and interrupt the hopes of Jesus and the disciples to enjoy some peace and quiet.

Verse 6:34: This verse is transitional. It can point back to the crowd's pursuit of Jesus, or ahead to the compassionate deed that will conclude Jesus' day of teaching. Jesus feeds His flock with His words, as Moses instructed Joshua to do (Number 27:17).

Verses 6:35-44: The feeding of the 5,000 follows. Those whom Jesus feeds are Jews, and the 12 baskets of leftovers most likely point to Jesus' compassion for the twelve tribes of His people. Some suggest that it may also contain a hint that the 12 disciples will become apostles).

Additional Notes from Tim Schaefer:

Why do the disciples and the crowds gather around Jesus? They want to know how Jesus is going to react to King Herod's brutality. There are cultural expectations. Unable to avoid the crowds and their curiosity as to how He is going to respond, Jesus decides, in the context of a bad shepherd (King Herod), to demonstrate what it means to be a "good" shepherd. This beloved miracle is presented using a format, which by its very length draws special attention to it. Jesus displays God-like shepherding skills as depicted in the Old Testament, e.g. Psalm 23, Psalm 77 -78, etc.

Filled with compassion, since the crowd is "like sheep without a shepherd," Jesus teaches them many things. Again, typical of Mark, the content of the teaching is not mentioned, but it is pretty safe to conclude it had to do with John, King Herod, and the nature of the Kingdom of God. Whatever it was, the crowds were fully engaged with what Jesus had to say, to the point of Jesus teaching right into the dinner hour. One can only imagine the disciples noting the sun sinking into the horizon and their master showing no concern. They voice their concern and Jesus tells them to feed them, to which they say, "We can't!"

In between the Eucharistic-like portions of this section is the command of Jesus to the crowd to "sit down (in Greek = *symposia*) upon the green grass."

In ancient Greece the *symposium* was a part of a banquet that took place after the meal, when drinking for pleasure was accompanied by music, dancing, recitals, or conversation — not unlike Herod's banquet described previously (6:21-29).

This is certainly reminiscent of Psalm 23. The King/ Shepherd Jesus is also going to have a *symposium* banquet, and does so in a manner that is mindful of an army commander. Is Jesus about soldier recruitment with which to deal with Herod militarily?

The disciples are enabled and hand out the food that miraculously feeds the crowd to the point of there being leftovers. We know from a book from the Pseudepigrapha, II Baruch 29:8, that when the Messianic Age arrived there was the expectation that the manna would start up again. Jesus has just produced “manna” in the Jewish wilderness, clearly a suggestion that that age has arrived for the nation of Israel and its 12 tribes (12 baskets left over). Jesus as Messiah is enough and more than enough.

As to the number of men that were fed, it would be tempting as logical Westerners to question the logistics of feeding and preaching to that many people. It occurs to me, however, that that number is the same number we came into contact with back with the demoniac named Legion (a Roman Legion is about 5,000 men). Maybe the number here suggests that Jesus now has His legion, which, inspired by the miracle, are ready to join the ranks of this Messiah’s army. But the final part removes that possibility. The disciples are sent back to the other side of the sea and the crowd is sent a different way, and Jesus is left standing alone. No legion is formed.