

## RETHINK EVERYTHING

Sermon Preached by Edee Fenimore

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Text: Mark 6: 30-56

Have you seen the television commercial, from which I stole the title of this sermon? It is a commercial for cars and the fact that I do not know the actual model or even make of the car would undoubtedly disappoint the creator of the commercial. Anyhow, the commercial begins with a lion raising her head and beginning to run. Then you see an antelope running. Then you are again looking at the lion and so it goes back and forth between the antelope and the lion. Then the shot widens and you see them both. But what you had expected, what you had assumed, is not what you see. The antelope is chasing the lion and with one swift move brings the lion down. The scene is not at all gory but it is completely unexpected and almost shocking. Several models of cars are shown and then the words that I used for the title: rethink everything.

When I read the passage from Mark that is the lectionary lesson for this morning, I kept thinking of that commercial. For everybody in this story of a day in the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth has to rethink everything. Nothing goes exactly as is expected. Let's examine this passage together. It is the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel of Mark, beginning with verse 30. As we begin to listen to this, let me assure you that I know this is probably not the account of the happenings during a single day. The writer of Mark presents it that way because he always writes as if there is great urgency to what is being done and said. He uses the word "immediately" very frequently. His accounts of shared stories are always more brief than either Luke or Matthew. It is as if he is saying, "Pay attention, every word here is important!"

The passage begins this way; "The apostles gathered around Jesus and told him all they had done and taught. 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. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves." So Jesus wants and the disciples expect that there will be some time for them all to renew their energy, to focus on their relationship with God and with each other, perhaps even some time to pray and rest and eat; a mini-Sabbath if you will. If we stopped our consideration of this passage here, I would say, "What good advice for the disciples then..... and now." As many of us in this room are aware, it is almost impossible to keep up the hectic pace at which life seems to proceed, especially in this city, if there is not time to renew ourselves, body and spirit. So this is a good thing, a practical thing, that Jesus suggests and the disciples expect. This going away to a deserted place by themselves is good for them; good for their bodies, minds and spirits.

But things do not work out as they expected and they have to rethink everything. Mark's words are "Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them." There are lots of they's and them's in that

sentence but we get the picture. Jesus and the disciples get into a boat and set off for a deserted place expecting some much needed R&R. The crowd that had been following them, drawn, we can suppose, by the powerful teaching and the frequent healings, spots them in this boat and they head out from many villages and towns by land and get to the no longer deserted spot before Jesus and the disciples arrive. Jesus and the disciples are expecting peace and quiet and they get a crowd. I suspect that the disciples already are thinking, "Send them away" but the writer of Mark does not tell us that. And because Jesus had suggested this withdrawal to a deserted place, perhaps the disciples also expected him to be upset by presence of the crowd pressing in on them. But in Mark's words, "As Jesus went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them for they were sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things." You can almost hear the disciples grumbling can't you? "Why couldn't he stick to the plan? We need our rest and so does he." The disciples then and probably some of us now long for things to remain the same, long to know exactly what it means to be God's person, to be a follower of Jesus. But it seems to me that at least part of what it means to be a follower of Jesus, to be God's person is to be so tuned into what is going on in the world that we can react to the constant changes; we can see where and how God's love is best brought to bear on the situation. That is exactly what Jesus does in this situation. He had compassion for the crowd because he saw that they were in need. He put aside his own needs, at least for the time being and met the needs of the people.

The story goes on and it is a story you have heard many, many times. This time, listen to it as if you did not know what was going to happen. And listen to how often things that happen are totally unexpected, how often the disciples and the people have to rethink everything.

Hear the words from Mark's gospel. "When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, 'This is a deserted place and the hour is now very late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat.' But Jesus 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 them something to eat?' And Jesus said to them, 'How many loaves have you? Go and see'. When they had found out, they said, 'Five and two fish.' Then Jesus ordered the disciples to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, Jesus 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. And all ate and were filled; and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men." Did you hear how many times expectations and assumptions were contradicted? The disciples expect Jesus to send the crowd away to get their food but Jesus not only does not send them away but asks the disciples to feed them. The disciples quickly add up what it would cost to get enough food for this crowd and ask if they are supposed to pay for all that. Even if they had shifted their thinking and understood that Jesus was not going to send the crowd away and that somehow they were going to have to feed the crowd, the disciples could only think of going out and buying what was needed. So Jesus by asking them to count up the loaves that were already there, asks them to re-think everything. And of course there is the whole question of how five loaves and two fish can feed five thousand men as well as the uncounted people, the women and children. It is

unimportant if this is called a miracle of generosity that takes place, or a miracle of God's spirit being present or a miracle of people being aware of the needs of others. Something amazing happened, something no one could have expected, something that surely caused the disciples and the crowd to rethink everything.

Let's now hear the rest of this morning's lesson, listening for those shifts in perception, that abandoning of assumptions, the re-shaping of expectations that marks the lives of those who seek to follow Jesus of Nazareth.

Mark's story continues, "Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. After saying farewell to them, he went up on the mountain to pray. When evening came the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. When he saw that they were straining at the oars against an adverse wind, he came towards them early in the morning walking on the sea. He intended to pass them by. But when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out; for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.' Then he got into the boat with them and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded for they did not understand about the loaves but their hearts were hardened. When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized Jesus and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged them that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak and all who touched it were healed."

What a day! Mark puts a bracket around all these amazing happenings by describing at the beginning and at the end of the day's events, what the ministry is about. It is about caring for those in need, teaching, healing, feeding, clothing those that are without, those that often are on the outside. Then Mark tells us that when someone is following Jesus, is living life God's way, that person is sure to be constantly facing the unexpected and that person must be ready to rethink everything.

We who are able to look at the life of Jesus of Nazareth see how often the evidence of God's love goes against the world's assumptions and expectations.

How would you expect God's love to come into the world? ... probably not as a baby born to a young girl engaged to a man with whom she has had no sexual relations- born in a place where animals are kept and placed in a feeding trough.

How would you expect the ministry of God's love to be announced to the world? Probably not by a strange rather wild man dressed in animal skins eating bugs and honey and yelling, "Messiah is coming. Repent!"

Who would you expect to be in the inner circle of those working to bring that ministry other? Probably not uneducated fishermen, tax collectors followed by many marginalized people including women.

And what would be an expected end to a life of teaching, preaching, healing, and caring- living life God's way? Probably not a trial, death as a criminal and burial. And after the burial; an ending that is a beginning, a defeat that becomes a victory, a separation that draws people together, grief that becomes joy, despair that becomes hope.

So for all of us that bear the name of Christian, who are God's people, who seek to follow Jesus, let us leave the assumptions and expectations of the world. Let us re-think everything.

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