

## ***“Yes, You Need Your Pastor...And Your Pastor Needs You”***

Fourth Sermon in the Five-week Series: “Yes, And...Exposure + Decompression”

*Yes, you can step outside of your comfort zone...and you can go back to it.*

Mark 6:30-46 (NRSV)

It is nice on World Communion Sunday to read a story where everyone who is hungry gets fed. Don't you wish that was a real headline that we all woke up to this morning?

This multiplication miracle, anecdotally called the “Feeding of the 5,000,” however, in actuality, we can imagine the number of hungry mouths in this biblical story being 3-4 times 5,000 because while the men are counted, but the women and children are not. The male experience being counted while the female experience goes uncounted is not just a reality of today, or yesterday<sup>1</sup> for that matter. It is dominate throughout our history. (Kudos to you Calvary for celebrating the voices of four ordained women who will lead Communion today!<sup>2</sup>)

Just because the voices and bodies of women and children

did not make into this biblical story, it does not mean they were not there. In our mind's eye, we can imagine this story to not just be a crowd of 5,000 people, but rather a crowd the size of 1/3 of the people gathering at the Broncos Stadium right about now for kick-off, or 20-25,000 people. (Thank you for being here, by the way!)

Now – why were so many people gathered in one place at one time? Well it wasn't because of a football game. It was because of Jesus. Imagine that!

In truth, Jesus and his disciples were trying to get away from the crowds and so they begin to make their way to a deserted place to decompress for a while. And they need this decompression time for two reasons.

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<sup>1</sup> Abigail Abrams, “Here's How Kavanaugh's Accusers Are Responding to His Supreme Court Confirmation,” *TIME* (6 Oct. 2018), accessed on 7 Oct. 2018 at

<http://time.com/5417815/kavanaugh-accusers-responding-supreme-court-confirmation/>.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. Mary Hulst, Rev. Morgan C. Fletcher, Rev. Anne J. Scalfaro, Rev. Alice Horner-Nelson.

First, earlier in Mark chapter 6, Jesus had been kicked out of his home town and it's at this point he realizes that he will not be able to reach everyone. He's not always going to be able to heal all the people who need healing and teach all the people who need teaching. So he sends out the disciples, two by two, for their first solo mission to cast out demons and heal the sick. And he tells them not to take anything except a staff – no food, no money, no clothes, not even a bag! They were completely on their own and dependent upon the hospitality of strangers.

Talk about exposure! This is important because when we read the first verse of our passage today, "*The apostles gathered around Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught,*" (v30) we now know what they were telling him! You can imagine that they are brimming over with excitement about all their success stories but also on the verge of collapsing from exhaustion and hunger. Jesus knows that pretty soon the adrenaline will wear off and they will need to rest.

Secondly, there's another element of exposure that they are feeling, and that Jesus is

most certainly feeling. Directly before this passage we read today, we learn that Herod has killed John the Baptist – beheaded him in fact. John – Jesus' cousin. Jesus' teacher and mentor. Jesus' baptizer. Indeed the teacher and leader of all the disciples and people in that area at that time.

I learned from Professor Jim Fleming in Israel that when we read in the text that Jesus "*had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd,*" (v34) it wasn't because they were missing Jesus in their lives; it was because they were mourning the man who had been their leader and shepherd up to that point – John. Jesus had just come on the scene, he was just getting to be known. But John had been leading and teaching for a long time; he was their senior leader. The people were streaming to Jesus because they were mourning John's death, they were frightened about Herod's cruelty, and they were hungry for some kind of word of hope. Not just hungry for food – but hungry for reassurance, for guidance, for leadership.

So just as Jesus and the disciples are in need of

decompression time to rest, rejuvenate, and grieve themselves – the masses show up needing Jesus. This is a familiar feeling for many pastors, at least it is for me. And it's true for other professions, I know. In the ministry it looks like this: At the same time that your people need a word of assurance about some world event or national tragedy or injustice or even a death within the congregation – the pastor herself is trying to grapple with those same feelings of shock, sadness, anger, and grief that everyone else is feeling. Our faith gets rocked; we have questions; we are heart-broken and confused too. We don't have words, even as we feel we must bring a word of hope to uplift the hearts of our people. And anytime we are actually able to do so, it's because of the grace of God.

Jesus was probably feeling some of this type of shepherd fatigue. Given that, this story is a lesson for all of us disciples because the disciples learn that they can't always turn to their leader for the answers, nor should they because they are capable themselves. I love how the disciples to go Jesus and say, *"It's late, send all these*

*people away so they can't themselves something to eat,"* (v35-36). And Jesus replies, *"No. You get them something to eat,"* (v37). They think that means going to the store and lugging back 5,000+ boxed lunches from Panera, but Jesus uses this opportunity to show them the difference between a theology of abundance and a theology of scarcity. The disciples are in a scarcity mindset – they are looking at all that they DO NOT have. Jesus says, *"Try again. Don't think about what's lacking, think about what you do have. What gifts are already among the people here today?"* (v37-38).

One interpretation of this text is that Jesus doesn't perform the miracle here. Rather he empowers his disciples to look at what is present in the gathered congregation and he instructs them to use the congregation's gifts to "perform the miracle."

It's quite a remarkable story. It's told in all four gospels, and all have different nuances, but one reason I love Mark's version is because it's really not about Jesus at all, it's about the people. They are the heroes here. They save the day. All

Jesus did not have the wisdom not to send the people away and to give them a few words of reassurance and to help create and cultivate a space for them to be together. And the people and the disciples engage in this miraculous ministry of multiplying abundance where all who are hungry get fed. If that's not the essence of the gospel I don't know what is!

And – when it was all said and done – Jesus didn't forget the mission he had at the beginning of this text: to rest. He leads the disciples away, and then he himself goes up to a mountain to pray (vs 45-46). In Scripture whenever we see “up to a mountain” it's pretty much code language for “meeting God.” God seems to always be met on mountaintops...or at least that's one place where in both the Old and New Testaments that God's presence is undoubtedly revealed. After the people needed Jesus, Jesus knew he needed God.

This whole story is a beautiful example of the cycle of the spiritual practices of exposure and decompression. Jesus says “*Yes, to ministry, and yes to rest.*” Even more, Jesus says, “*Yes, to my leadership and ministry, and yes to the*

*people's leadership and ministry too.*”

Yes, Jesus is the Shepherd of all the people flocking to him, and Yes, he allows his flock, his disciples, to share in ministry with him and even for him at times. Jesus says Yes to the God of all Creation alive and at work in him, and Jesus says Yes to the God of all creation alive and at work in all of us.

Calvary, it is a gift to serve as one of your pastors. I stand humbly in a long line of dedicated servant leaders; this stole I am wearing reminds of that. Senior Pastor Larry Loughhead and Pastor Mary Hulst got these in Guatemala for their staff. Then Senior Pastor Mary Hulst passed it on to Senior Pastor Brian Henderson. And Brian passed it on to me. It is a reminder of the mantle we wear as shepherds of our Calvary flock, but also a reminder that we are not in this work alone and that as Baptists, we believe in the priesthood of all believers, which is really the model Jesus is giving us in our text today. That it's not all about the “pastor” or the “minister” or the one who is named “leader.” It's about how God gifts, works through, and

empowers all people. And yes, the pastor is a part of that...we try to make it our full time job to be tuned into God and where the Spirit is leading...but Lord knows we miss the mark sometimes, and when we do – you are there. You are always there...through the celebrations and through the struggles, you are there.

When I think of the last ten years, one word that stands out to me about Calvary is Transition. While all transition is hard, leadership transition can be especially challenging because everybody responds differently. Some grieve the past and long for it. Some can't wait to move on to the future. And all of these mixed emotions get muddled up in the present.

As we read this story, we are witnessing the first crucial moments of leadership transition from John to Jesus. Jesus knew in that this moment is what his baptism from John was about. That now it was fully his turn to lead – the stole is being bequeathed, so to speak. And Jesus had an opportunity to lead in a way that exalted himself and all that *he* could do – but he didn't lead in that way. He led by

encouraging the disciples to figure out how to problem solve and minister. He led by helping the people see they had all they needed among themselves already. Yes, Jesus was there for them in this time of grief and transition, and yes they were going to be okay because of God working in and among them...they had it within themselves to make it through and care for each other in this tough time, and even, care for their Shepherd.

The fact is: All the people got fed. Somehow. It might have been a literal miracle. Or it might have been that everyone *thought* they didn't have anything to eat because they didn't bring a proper sack lunch that day, but once Jesus asked them to look again and see what they did have and not what they didn't have – they may have remembered, oh yeah, “*I carry almonds in my purse*” or “*I have a granola bar in car (I mean, in my camel's satchel)*” or “*Well I actually do have this loaf of bread I got at the market today but I wasn't really thinking of that as dinner...but it could be if it needs to be,*” etc. You get the picture. Sometimes we have the resources we need right before us, we just need help

reframing how we look at them, and realize that God can use them in ways beyond what we could ever ask or imagine.

How is this relevant to us, you ask? As you celebrate me today, all I want to say to YOU today Calvary is this: We're in this together Calvary. *"Yes, You Need Your Pastor, and Your Pastor Needs You."* Never for a minute do I ever want you to doubt that you are the hands and feet of Christ in the world. You make ministry happen here. Not me. Not Morgan or Alice or any one staff member. But *all of us* together.

We've talked about the leadership transition taking place in today's scripture. Do you know how many leadership transitions we've had at Calvary over the past 10 years? I'm just talking paid staff here, not even counting committee chairs and Council moderators and volunteer staff. I spent some time looking at old annual reports this weekend and I calculated that we have said goodbye to 32 staff members over the last 10 years, and that number jumps to 44 if you add interns and interim staff. And, of course, with all of

those goodbyes there was first a hello to that new staff person.

And we have 11 people on staff right now that we haven't had to say goodbye to (knock on wood) – and so that means that over the last 10 years we have had 55 staff transitions. Every one of these 55 transitions represents relationships that have been formed – and excitement over saying hello and grief over saying goodbye. And some of them, as you know, have been much more taxing and trying than others.

We've also had other transitions – like ministries starting and stopping, church structure changing, and even renovations and changes to our physical building. And of course we are always having membership changes – a lot of which is because of death of beloved members.

I've done 75+ funerals in the last 10 years. Those are just funerals that I have officiated. My first 3.5 years here, Brian was the Senior Pastor and he led most all the funerals, so the collective grief in the congregation is even larger. A good handful of those deaths have been tragic or untimely and unexpected and have really

rocked our congregational spirit.

Given these numbers, do you realize Calvary that you – each one of *you* sitting here today – are the ones that have carried us through? You have kept showing up on Sundays. You have kept volunteering to keep our ministries going and our building up and running.

Pastors and paid staff and even volunteer leaders come and go. But you remain. You minister to yourselves and to the world and yes, you pastor to the pastor when I need a hug, an encouraging word, a listening ear, or even just a silent nod of understanding. You have quote “fed the 5,000” in your midst in and through all of these tough times...and honestly, all I’ve tried to do along the way is faithfully keep showing up myself, Sunday after Sunday, as Jesus showed up to the crowd that day. And I’ve tried most days to point us to the abundance in our midst, instead of focusing on the scarcity. To look at who IS HERE and what GIFTS WE HAVE instead of focusing on who is NOT HERE and the GIFTS WE LACK.

Calvary, we who are here today are here because God has called

us together to be a flock for such a time as this...not for last year or next year but for *this year*...to figure out how to feed all the hungry people in our midst – physically and spiritually.

Through all this change and exposure, welcome and unwelcome, the number one way we have decompressed together is in the breaking of bread. In large groups like when we take communion in worship, and in small groups when we gather in homes. And everything in between.

I also spent some time this weekend trying to calculate the number of times we’ve broken bread together Calvary in the last ten years – from communion services to Lenten dinners to meals on youth trips to snack time with the kiddos to church school holiday parties and beginning year brunches to dinner dances and stewardship dinners and thanksgiving breakfasts and gathering Sunday lunches, Modern Mature meals, and more.

My calculations are that in the last ten years, we have broken bread in some form or another together 3,009 times (see appendix). This is not counting

anything individual in people's homes – which is probably a lot. If you add in the meals we have prepared for Family Promise – guesstimate 1,050 – and the food sacks we've given out at Bootstraps – guesstimate 2,280 – then the number of times we've broken bread together or shared bread with others is 6,339!

That number far outweighs the number of people we have grieved or the number of staff we have said goodbye too. And the thing is – all of those people are present in spirit in a mystical way around this table that we celebrate on World Communion Sunday – Saints above and Saints below. This number shows me that the constant through our lives – through all of the ups and downs – is, literally and spiritually, bread. Jesus as the Bread of Life. Breaking bread together in fellowship and fun. Breaking bread to remember the sacrifice and love of God. Breaking bread to remember that when someone is hungry and we feed them we are feeding Jesus himself. Breaking bread to share stories together. Breaking bread to unite (despite all of our differences and divisions) in our common need *to be fed* and *to feed*.

On this World Communion Sunday Calvary, remember that you are the hands and feet of Christ – who feed the hungry and who nourish one another. You are strong and resilient and you do not give up easily. You are courageous and you endure. You are welcoming. You are up for a challenge and you know how to comfort.

Yes, it is my great privilege to be your pastor, and yes Calvary it is *your* faith, strength, prayers, generosity, and trust that allows me to lead you. Yes, today marks my 10 years of ministry with you, and today marks your 10 years of ministry to me and alongside me, and more importantly, to our community and to our world.

Through all that we have been exposed to and all that we will be exposed to in the years to come, may we remember three things:

1) We are in this together – I need you, just as much as you need me.

2) It is through the strength and love of the body of Christ that we are re-membered whenever we are broken; the Body of Christ is made whole each and



every time we gather around this table.

3) There are lots of hungry people in the world that need to be fed – and that is the heart of our ministry.

It is good to commune together, and know that God welcomes us again and again to this Table of Love, Transformation and Hope.

Though the flock may change over the years and the ministries may morph and adapt and the human shepherds may come and go, our One True Shepherd, Jesus Christ our Lord, never leaves us. And in order to feeding the people of the world, he needs us just as much as we need him – for we are his hands and feet today.

Through all the struggles and all the celebrations, we are the change-makers, the gospel-bearers, the love-embracers, the communion-sharers...we are the Body of Christ – Broken and Blessed – together. Thanks be to God!

Amen.

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Appendix: Estimated “Breaking Bread Calculations” for last 10 Years at Calvary:

12x10 = 120 (Worship Communion)  
2x10 = 20 (Xmas Eve/Maundy Thursday)  
40x2 = 80 (CTCL)  
9x3=27 (CTCL)  
2x9 = 18 (H&W)  
10x1 = 10 (Annual Mtg)  
7x1 = 7 (Stewardship Dinner)  
3x1 = 3 (Dinner Dance)  
5x1 = 5 (New Hope BC)  
10x1 = 10 (Celebrations)  
2x1 = 2 (Stephen Ministry retreats)  
8x12 = 96 (Modern Matures lunches)  
6x1 = 6 (Nonagenarians & VIP Lunches)  
10x1 = 10 (Baptism receptions)  
2x1 = 2 (Comm at funeral)  
10x1 = 10 (New member fellowships)  
80x1 = 80 (Funeral receptions)  
10x1 = 10 (Thanksgiving)  
10x1 = 10 (Chili cook offs)  
36x2 = 72 (Wed Together meals)  
6x10 = 60 (Church school Xmas parties)  
12x10 = 120 (Class brunches)  
3x3x3 = 27 (Congregational retreat meals)  
6x10 = 60 (Lenten dinners)  
3x7x15 = 315 (Youth camp/trip meals)  
48x10 = 480 (ABY meals)  
50x10 = 500 (Kids’ snack times)  
5x2 = 10 (VBS snack times)  
52x10 = 520 (Coffee hours)  
10x1 = 10 (Staff Xmas parties)  
5x1 = 5 (Fundraising socials)  
10x2 = 20 (DICP + Family Promise fundraisers)  
10x1 = 10 (Gathering Sundays)  
8x5 = 40 (Dinners for 8)  
10x3 = 30 (AwA meals)  
5x1 = 5 (Hanging of the Green meals)  
10x1 = 10 (ABW Epiphany party)  
5x1 = 5 (Wedding receptions)  
9x4x4 = 144 (GPS Theology Pub)  
4x10 = 40 (Forum lunches)

TOTAL = 3,009

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