



## SUNDAY SERMON

# If You Don't Know You're Sick

---

Friends — can I tell you how excited I was when I sat to write the sermon this week? You see last Sunday, David said something in his sermon that made a light go off for me: he pointed out that the story we heard last week, about Herod's decadent feast for the rich and the powerful — you know, the feast at which Herod gives his greedy daughter Salome John the Baptist's head on a platter — Mark puts the story of this wicked feast right before he tells the story of the feeding of the 5,000 — Jesus' feast for the poor and the outcast.

Herod's feast is exclusive, for the rich and the powerful, and it leads to death. Jesus' feast is inclusive, for the poor and the oppressed, and everybody, and it leads to life. I never noticed this juxtaposition before! I know I'm a bible nerd, but seriously — the more I live with this ancient text, the more I fall in love with it. It's a story about justice and equality and love that just won't stop.

At any rate, I was certain that this week, I was going to get to preach about the other feast, Jesus' feast, the one on the lakeshore where he feeds 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish. Which is great, because I love that story. Even though it's implausible, one of those crazy miracle stories. I've stopped worrying about how these stories could actually have happened, thanks to biblical scholar John Dominic Crossan. Crossan says these miracle stories are really parables — parables the early church told about Jesus — which go along with the parables they remembered that Jesus told about ... all sorts of things.

However they thought of them, the Gospel writers thought this story was important. The feeding of the 5,000 is important enough to turn up in each of the Gospels, which is unusual enough. And on top of that, Matthew and Mark like the story so much that they tell it twice! The second telling is almost identical, except in that version only 4,000 people are fed. The point is, this story about feeding the multitudes was important enough to make it into the Gospels six times. And there are only four Gospels.

But! Friends, I have been foiled by the lectionary. If you look closely at your bulletin, you will see that there are some verses missing from the Gospel passage this morning: verses 35 through 52 to be exact, which is enough time for Mark to tell not one, but two miracle stories. The first is the feeding of the 5,000; the second is Jesus walking on water and calming the storm.

Now why on earth would the lectionary people decide to take both of those stories out of the Gospel reading this morning, and leave in what they chose to leave in? Which — what they left in is fine, don't get me wrong, but doesn't really compare in terms of narrative interest.

To be fair, we will get to hear the Feeding of the 5,000 story — but next week, and in John's version. As some of you may know, I generally think that Mark's version of events is a little spicier and spikier and interesting. Oh well.

*Continued*

### DATE

Ninth Sunday after  
Pentecost  
Sunday, July 22, 2018

### PREACHER

The Rev. Jason Cox

So here's what the lectionary people decided to leave in today: a story about Jesus seeing all the people who needed him and beginning to understand that they were like sheep without a shepherd; and the people seeing Jesus, and recognizing him — at once — as the one who could cut through all the legalistic stuff from the synagogue and the temple and instead bring healing right into the center of their being.

Let's review where we've been in Mark's Gospel over the past few weeks: Jesus' ministry is growing. At the beginning of chapter six, he decides it's time to start spreading the word further afield than just the small villages around where he grew up. So Jesus sends his new disciples out to spread the news, to share with the people Jesus' vision of radical access to God — access that didn't have to come through the temple. The disciples go out and pray for people who are hurting and offer healing to those who are sick. And given the economic realities of the world these people inhabited you can bet that a fair number of them were hurting — and hungry — and really needed healing.

Then last week, we had the bizarre aside about Herod's decadent banquet, that ended with John the Baptist's head on a platter. And it's right after that horrific scene that we find Jesus looking out at the crowd gathered on the shores of lake Galilee and suddenly realizing: these sheep have no shepherd. Herod's not going to do anything for them. People didn't have much hope for King Herod, but he's the one, politically, that should have stood in the breach for his hurting people, he should have done something to protect them from the rapacious forces of Rome. But after the John incident it's clear that not only is Herod vain and stupid, he's wicked to the core. There isn't anybody left to lead the people. Jesus knows that he must do it or no one will.

Now in my frustration that the feeding of the 5,000 story got cut, I was curious to see if Mark's other version of the story — the feeding of the 4,000 — ever makes it into the lectionary. It doesn't. But when I was researching that, I came across this passage, which comes as a little action-reflection between Jesus and the disciples after the second version of the story. By the way, this passage never makes it into the lectionary either:

Mark writes "Now the disciples had forgotten to bring any bread and they had only one loaf with them in the boat" — and I'm going to pause here just to appreciate how snarky Mark is being about that — because if the disciples have learned anything so far, it's that you should probably bring along some bread whenever you get into a boat with Jesus. But the disciples never learn anything in Mark's gospel. He goes on:

"Jesus cautioned them, saying, 'Watch out—beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod.' The disciples said to one another, 'It is because we have no bread.' And becoming aware of it, Jesus said to them, 'Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes, and fail to see? Do you have ears, and fail to hear?'"

Ok — so maybe the lesson isn't about packing enough bread after all. To be fair to the disciples, Jesus is being cryptic: what can he possibly mean by "the yeast of the Pharisees — and the yeast of Herod." Well — Yeast rises. We know that. A little bit of yeast goes a long way. From another parable Jesus tells, we know that we are called to be yeast in the world: by which Jesus means that a little bit of the hope and the love we learn from him will also go a long way toward making the world a better place.

The bad yeast of the Pharisees — and of Herod — must work in the same way. Just a little bit of what they've got can creep in and ruin the whole loaf. In the case of the Pharisees, who were religious authorities, the thing being ruined would be the temple and the priests. In the case of Herod, the thing being ruined is nothing short of the kingdom, the state, the welfare of all the people. Beware the yeast of the Pharisees, and of Herod. But — what is the yeast?

I'm going to go out on a limb here — because we can't know exactly what Jesus meant — but I think this yeast must be money, or power, or probably both. Beware the yeast of Herod. Just a little bit of power, or a little bit of money — used in the wrong way, for the wrong things — can get right inside you, like an infection.

*Continued*

And if you're not careful, this infection will rise in you like yeast and ruin you completely. Until you can't tell the difference between right and wrong, between truth and lies.

But even then, I believe that hope is not lost. Jesus is calling you to open your eyes. If you can just begin to see the state you're in. If you know that you need a healer — like all those people gathered on the shore at Genesaret — then you'll be able to recognize the healer when he comes. His name is Jesus. Drink down just a little bit of his truth — that all we have comes from God; that sharing is the only way; that love is the thing that moves the universe — and that truth will clear up your infection pretty quick.

Amen.