

Soul food, part 3

Mark 8:11-21

The Yeast of the Pharisees and Herod

¹¹ The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven. ¹² He sighed deeply and said, "Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to it." ¹³ Then he left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side.

¹⁴ The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat. ¹⁵ "Be careful," Jesus warned them. "Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod."

¹⁶ They discussed this with one another and said, "It is because we have no bread."

¹⁷ Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? ¹⁸ Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember? ¹⁹ When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?"

"Twelve," they replied.

²⁰ "And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?"

They answered, "Seven."

²¹ He said to them, "Do you still not understand?"

Have you ever had an embarrassing misunderstanding? A time when your brain stops working?

On the radio the other day was "a moment when your brain just fails you".

- A woman in her 20 just realised that tigers were not female lions.
- A guy was on his computer, spilt his drink on his lap then hit Ctrl -Z.
- One lady thought Tsunami was a country in Asia.
- A guy, for year, thought Calvin Harris was Ralph Harris' son.
- The guy who put a pie in the microwave, then typed in his pin number instead of the cook time. Spoiler alert – the pie was very hot.

Sometimes your brain just won't compute, you miss something that, in retrospect seems so obvious.

Well Jesus is totally dumbstruck about how his disciples can be so thick. So the old saying goes "Every text has a context" and in the gospels this is more true than in any other part of the Bible. Every story you read is directly linked to all the stories around it. The Gospel writers place them in a particular order to make a point or to communicate a meaning.

Mark does something a bit peculiar in his gospel – he places the 2 feeding stories, 5000/4000 just a chapter apart. Basically the same story, the same miracle, but he does it to illustrate a point. Mark thinks that there is a greater message being communicated here.

In verses 19-20 he makes a particular point about the numbers. Some mention that 12 is the number of Israel, 12 tribes, 12 apostles. While 7 is the number of the world or the gentiles. 7 also represents divinity.

Mark sees meaning in these numbers which led him to include these 2 feeding miracles. Jesus was indicating more that he was just a prophet with power but that through Him God would feed and nourish the whole world – Gentiles and Jews alike – all are included in his new vision. And the ones who sees the truth of Christ are not the ones you would expect.

The main point Mark is making in this passage is that no one gets it. The Pharisees, the keepers of the Law, the most religious men in Israel – they demand a sign.... As if Jesus didn't just give them one. Because they don't really want a sign, they just want to discredit Jesus. If he gave them one they would have just dismissed it because they have no interest in believing.

Even the disciples are blind to what's happening... they still don't believe, they don't understand.

But look at what happens in chapter 7, the chapter between the 2 feeding miracles.

In verses 1-22 Jesus declares all things clean, all food clean and heals the Greek woman's daughter.

27 "First let the children eat all they want," he told her, "for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."28 "Lord," she replied, "even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."29 Then he told her, "For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter."

Again Jesus speaks of bread, the bread is to go to the Jews first, but this woman is happy with the scraps, she is hungry for the bread. This woman is a gentile; and she believes, she sees, she has faith. While the Pharisees, and even the disciples don't see.

Mark is saying to us the bread of life is being offered to us all – the Jews and the gentile – and it's the unlikely ones who see and believe. The gentiles are hungry for the crumbs that fall from the table, while the Jews are rejecting the whole loaf.

The people who were the most likely to recognise Jesus for who and what he is, not understanding what Jesus is about, what his miracles is about. They are too focused on the things of this world – the bread in their bellies, the culture and tradition of their people – that they are blinded to the amazing truth in front of them. What they can see and hear and feel is blinding them to the greatest spiritual reality that they will ever know.

What we need more than food for the belly is food for the soul. As much as we need to be nourished by bread and water, this is the hunger Jesus want to fill, not our physical hunger but spiritual hunger.

Jesus came not to do party tricks but to fill that empty hole in us – a hole that cannot be filled with bread, or wine, or new cars, houses, bigger TV. But a hunger and a thirst for contentment in this life and confidence in the next. A hunger to know the creator of all things, and know we are loved... we are called to be his.

We say that all the time but do we ever really think about that?

In Genesis 29 Jacob is tricked into marrying Leah, when he wants Rachel. He marries them both but Leah is unloved, she is the wife Jacob didn't want. God sees this and take pity on her, his heart is moved by one of his daughters that is unloved.

I love that image God hates to see his people unloved. So he showered the whole world with the purest love there is.

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 1 John 4:10

The creator of all things, loves me and he wants to fill that hole in my heart. He loved me even when I wanted nothing to do with him.

Like the story of the prodigal son we wonder, we pull away, we reject that love. We chase after something else, we make ourselves to busy for God. Our hearts are restless, they wonder and stray, they chase after all the delights of the world, we become weary and distant. As Augustine once say, "my restless heart, finds rest in you".

In Christ we find rest for our weary hearts.

John 6 after the feeding of the 5000:

³² Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."³⁴ "Sir," they said, "always give us this bread."

³⁵ Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty"

In Christ do we find rest for our weary hearts? In Christ do we find nourishment for our hungry souls?

In John this passage happens after the feeding of the 5000. Still the disciples miss the point, they think Jesus is talking about some magic bread. But they have the bread, they have the very source of life for the world standing there amongst them. In Christ we see this bread.

If your life is feeling a little empty or unfulfilling, the answer is not in a new car; it's not found at the pub; it's not getting a better paid job, or an overseas trip, a bigger house. They are just mist, a vapour on the wind, here one day gone the next. In this world we sink all our time into lifestyle, appearance, and career then we wonder why we're depressed, or unfulfilled or unhappy.

Because the bread of life is there to be eaten, it's in connecting with his people, his word and in prayer. The bread that will stop you from being hungry.

These are the things that give life meaning.

How's your prayer life going? When was the last time you actively read a book of the Bible? Are you going to a life group?

This is how we feast on the bread of life, by immersing ourselves in God. And if we are not doing it then we are no better than the Pharisees, no wiser than the disciples.

Make a pledge to yourself, read the book of Mark and pray on the bus instead of listening to music.