

“DON’T YOU REMEMBER?”

Mark 8:1-26

Key Verse: 8:18

“Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don’t you remember?”

To understand this passage, it is good to trace Jesus’ movements. The feeding of the 5,000 took place near Bethsaida (6:30-44; Lk 9:10). Then Jesus went to Gennesaret and healed many sick people (6:53). This was the end of his Galilean ministry. The principle of Jesus’ ministry was “first to the Jew, then to the Gentile” (Ro 1:16, etc.). After finishing Galilean ministry, Jesus went to the Gentile territory of Tyre and Sidon and into the Decapolis (7:24,31). After that, Jesus went back to the region of Dalmanutha in Galilee very briefly (8:10). Then Jesus crossed the lake, to Bethsaida (8:13,22). From there, Jesus took his disciples to the villages around Caesarea Philippi, where he gave them a final test about who he is (8:27). The setting of today’s passage is the Decapolis, where Jesus fed a large crowd of Gentiles, whom the Jews despised as lawless and ungodly. Yet Jesus showed them the same compassion that he had shown to the people of Israel. This tells us that Jesus is not only the Savior of Israel, but of the Gentiles too.

After finishing his Galilean ministry, Jesus focused even more on raising his disciples. Ever since he called his disciples, Jesus had revealed himself to them by being with them as he taught the words of God, healed the sick, drove out demons, and performed miracles. The disciples’ faith was growing; they even experienced his power through them as they practiced what they learned from Jesus. Still, they needed revelation from heaven to understand who Jesus is (Mt 16:17).

In this passage Jesus appeals to his hardened disciples to remember what he had done so that they might know who he is and put their trust in him. Sometimes, though we follow Jesus as his disciples, our own hearts become hardened as we confront harsh realities. Then we can become anxious and fearful and worry about our future. At this moment, we need to remember what Jesus has done for us. Let us hear Jesus’ words, “Don’t you

remember?” Focusing on this word, we will consider today’s passage in three parts: Jesus shares his compassion with his disciples by feeding a large crowd (1-10), Jesus appeals to his disciples’ hardened hearts (11-21), and Jesus helps his disciples open their spiritual eyes (22-26).

First, Jesus shares his compassion with his disciples (1-10). In verse 1, the words “During those days” refers to the time when Jesus was in Decapolis, Gentile territory. As we heard from Pastor Kevin last Sunday, some people had brought a man who was deaf and mute, and Jesus healed him, saying, “Ephphatha!” which means, “Be opened!” Jesus’ words opened his ears, his tongue was loosened, and he began to speak plainly. Perhaps, when Jesus performed this miracle, he had his disciples in mind. People responded with amazement. Though Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone, they could not keep silent. Soon another large crowd gathered. They were like sheep without a shepherd. They were thirsty for love, healing, and words of truth. They followed Jesus wherever he went and stayed with him. They had been with Jesus for three days, even though they were hungry. Jesus knew their situation very well and called his disciples to him and said, “I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance” (2-3).

It seems that Jesus went into Gentile territory to have quiet time with his disciples. However, Jesus could not escape from the desperate, needy people who came to him. Humanly speaking, this crowd was very annoying and burdensome. But Jesus was not burdened at all. Rather, he had compassion on them. Jesus did not consider himself--his health and his plan; instead, Jesus put himself in the places of those coming to him. Jesus felt their pains, agonies, and sorrows as his own. Jesus knew that by now, they were hungry and exhausted. Hunger often produces anger; thus there is a word that describes this condition: “hangry.” Many Americans suffered from acute hunger and malnutrition during the Great Depression. And surprisingly, it is estimated that today 42 million Americans suffer from food insecurity due to the financial pressure of the Covid 19 crisis.¹ It has also been reported that 40% of university undergrad students are food insecure.² The people of Jesus’

¹ <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/food-insecurity>

² <https://thecounter.org/survey-finds-40-percent-of-college-students-are-food-insecure>

time must have suffered even more. Jesus is concerned not only about our souls, but our whole person. Jesus understands all our sorrows and agonies and helps us as our merciful and faithful Savior (Heb 2:17).

Why did Jesus share his compassionate heart with his disciples? He wanted them to grow as compassionate shepherds for God's people. Among many things to learn from Jesus, his compassionate heart is most essential. Compassion is one of the most important attributes of God. God introduced himself to Moses as, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God..." (Ex 34:6). He called himself "compassionate" first of all. If God treats us with justice only, no one can survive. But God does not treat us as our sins deserve; rather, he treats us with compassion. Psalm 103:13-14 says, "As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust." As God has had compassion on us, so we too need compassion toward others. Colossians 3:12 says, "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." As we raise our children and Bible students and live in community with each other, we need to practice God's compassion. Then we can understand other people's situations, bear their weaknesses, and help them grow so the body of Christ may be edified.

How did the disciples respond to Jesus? When Jesus shared his heart with them, they were moved to participate willingly. So they answered, "But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?" (4) They were not rebellious, but cooperative. They began to be concerned about hungry people. But practically speaking, they could do little. It was a remote place, and thousands of hungry people were there. Jesus wanted them to learn how to overcome impossible situations. He asked them, "How many loaves do you have?" (5) Jesus' question turned their minds away from impossibility and toward possibility. They could begin to think about what they had to offer Jesus. So they brought seven loaves, which was most likely their own dinner. Jesus took the loaves and gave thanks to God. He must have been thankful for the disciples' growing faith. Jesus blessed the loaves and some fish as well and fed four thousand people through his disciples (6-7). The people all ate and were satisfied (8). God's blessing was overflowing; there were even seven basketfuls of leftovers (8). Jesus' compassion produced a

miracle. When we have Jesus' compassion, we can also experience his miraculous power--even in the pandemic. Jesus sent the crowd away and got into a boat with them and went to the region of Dalmanutha, in Galilee (9-10).

Second, Jesus appeals to his hard-hearted disciples (11-21). As soon as Jesus set his feet upon the soil of Galilee, the Pharisees appeared. They came to test him, asking for a sign from heaven (11). Though Jesus had performed many miracles, the Pharisees suppressed the truth and claimed it was the work of Beelzebub--prince of demons (3:22). Their hearts were hardened because of deliberate unbelief. Jesus was deeply sorry. He sighed deeply, "Why does this generation ask for a sign?" Jesus did not give them any sign (12). Jesus left them, got back into the boat, and crossed to the other side (13).

They departed so quickly that the disciples forgot to bring the abundant leftover bread with them. They had only one loaf in the boat. At this moment, Jesus said, "Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod." After discussing it among themselves, the disciples felt Jesus was rebuking them for not bringing the bread (16). When they heard the word "yeast," they automatically thought of bread. But Jesus was talking about bad influence. They totally missed Jesus' point. Why did Jesus warn his disciples? They should grow to become leaders who could influence the world for Christ. Their faith had grown a lot, but still they were vulnerable to the bad influence of powerful religious and political leaders. They might have been intimidated by the Pharisees at the last encounter. They worried about their future and were distracted from learning of Jesus.

How were the Pharisees and Herod a bad influence? The yeast of the Pharisees is pride and self-righteousness. Though they had great zeal for God, they ignored God's heart of mercy and compassion, love, and justice. They worshiped God with their lips, but their hearts were far from God. The yeast of Herod refers to misusing power to gratify one's own desires for an immoral and pleasure-seeking lifestyle. Since we all have sinful desires, we are susceptible to the influences of sexual immorality, greed, and pride. We should always watch out for bad influence.

Aware of their discussion, Jesus was deeply sorry that they had no spiritual sense about his warning. They were slow to grow, and still very dull

spiritually. It would be easy for Jesus to become impatient with them. However, Jesus did not react emotionally. Rather, he appealed to them based on the facts to help them understand the meaning of his miracles. To do so, Jesus prodded them with eight consecutive questions: “Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don’t you remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?” “Twelve,” they replied. “And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?” They answered, “Seven.” He said to them, “Do you still not understand?” Jesus really wanted them to understand him by hearing his words, seeing his works, and knowing the meaning in their hearts. To understand, they needed to remember what Jesus had done.

Though Jesus had done so many miraculous works, he helped his disciples remember two events based on the facts: feeding five thousand with five loaves and two fish--leaving twelve basketfuls left over; and feeding four thousand with seven loaves--leaving seven basketfuls left over. They were unforgettable events, which had just happened recently, but the disciples had already forgotten. They should remember and understand the meaning of these events. These events reveal who Jesus is, especially his limitless compassion, almighty power, and unending love; Jesus is God incarnate. When they remembered and understood they could put their faith in Jesus. When they faced difficulties, they could overcome them by faith. Then they could grow to be good shepherds like Jesus.

Here we learn that remembering what Jesus has done is an essential part of growing in faith. Then, what do we remember? We tend to remember scary images, like snarling religious and political leaders, which make us fearful, useless, and bitter, and then we complain a lot. Also, we tend to remember hurtful things that others have done. When we do so, we become angry and sorrowful, and our wounds become more serious. We may also remember our past failures and sins and become fatalistic. We should not remember these things, but rather what Jesus has done. Jesus has done so many beautiful, wonderful things, for each of us personally, in our community, and nationally. The Bible strongly exhorts us to remember what Jesus has done for us. Titus 3:3-5a says, “At one time we too were foolish, disobedient,

deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated, and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.” We need to remember not only God’s saving grace, but also how he has answered our prayers. It is easy for us to pray a lot but forget what God has done. Let us remember what God has done for each of us and be thankful.

We also need to remember the great things God has done among us and through us in UBF for the last 60 years. For this reason we are having a World Mission Report on May 30. Moreover, we should remember how God has worked mightily in America. God raised numerous sacrificial, devoted missionaries and sent them to the whole world. One of them is Mother Barry. As noted by the American historian Robert William Fogel, there have been four Great Awakenings in American history.³ The first one began in the 1730’s through Jonathan Edwards and George Whitfield. The second one came in the 1790s through Charles Finney and many “circuit riders” who went from town to town preaching the gospel. The third one in the 1860’s, caught fire through D.L. Moody. The fourth one was led by Billy Graham, beginning in the 1950’s. These awakening movements have come during dark times. As we remember them, we realize that God can do great things in our times too, even though our national condition may seem to be very dark. God is living and almighty. Let’s pray like the prophet Habakkuk: “Lord, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, Lord. Repeat them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy” (Hab 3:2). Let’s remember what God has done so that we may know that he is living today and working just as he did in the past. Then we can be thankful and grow spiritually as influential men and women of God.

Third, Jesus plants hope in his disciples by healing a blind man (22-26). After being rebuked, Jesus knew that his disciples needed encouragement. They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him (22). Usually Jesus healed needy people immediately out of his compassion. But this time Jesus healed the blind man progressively. Jesus took him by the hand and led him outside the village (23a). Jesus spat on the man’s eyes and put his hands on him and asked, “Do you see anything?” (23b) The

³ Fogel, Robert William, “The Fourth Great Awakening and the Future of Egalitarianism” (U. Chicago Press: Chicago, IL, 2000).

man looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around" (24). When the disciples heard this, they might have thought, "Are you talking to me? Do I have eyes, but fail to see?" Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly (25). The disciples thought, "Yes, that is what I want--to see Jesus clearly." Jesus sent the man home, saying, "Don't even go into the village" (26).

Through this event, Jesus revealed that he is the promised Messiah, who can open the eyes of the blind (Isa 35:5). Still, it was not easy for his disciples to realize. Actually, no one can see Jesus clearly without revelation from God. That is why Paul prayed, "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better" (Eph 1:17). This is why we have been praying throughout Mark's gospel study to know Jesus better. Though we may be slow to grow and slow to understand, Jesus never dismisses us. Still he has hope for each of us to see him clearly and grow to be like him. We, too, should have hope for others to grow spiritually and pray for them. If we lose hope for them, they may lose hope for themselves. St. Paul said that love always hopes (1 Cor 13:7). When we practice this love with hope, we can grow in knowing Jesus' heart.

As I prepared this message, I asked the Lord what he wants me to remember. Then, I was reminded of Jesus' compassion through P. Abraham Kim, the late Dr. Samuel Lee, and Mother Sarah Barry, which led me to the cross of Jesus. At the cross, Jesus forgave my sins of pride, lust and greed, and healed wounds of betrayal by someone I had fully trusted. Jesus called me as a shepherd and gave me the most wonderful wife, who has borne with me patiently and lovingly for the past 35 years. Remembering this tangible compassion of Christ and his powerful love have renewed my heart. Now I am ready to serve God's people with compassion. And though many challenges await, I can meet them with confidence in the Lord. I pray that we may all remember what God has done for us, overcome the bad influences in the world, and grow to be shepherds like Jesus.