

Mark 6:30-44
March 20, 2011

QUESTIONS JESUS ASKED
“HOW MANY LOAVES HAVE YOU?”

(Before scripture)

WE'RE IN THE SECOND WEEK OF A LENTEN SERIES THAT FOCUSES ON “QUESTIONS JESUS ASKED.”

I THINK IT'S A GOOD PLACE TO FOCUS, NOT JUST BECAUSE JESUS WAS A MARVELOUS ASKER OF QUESTIONS, BUT ALSO BECAUSE WE COULD ALL PROBABLY BENEFIT FROM ASKING MORE QUESTIONS OURSELVES.

I CERTAINLY BELIEVE WE NEED TO DO MORE OF THAT AS FOLLOWERS OF JESUS.

WE HAVE A TENDENCY, WITHIN OUR CHRISTIAN FAITH, TO WANT TO TELL MORE THAN WE WANT TO ASK.

WE WANT TO GIVE ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS PEOPLE AREN'T EVEN ASKING!

WE WANT TO MAKE SURE SOMEONE KNOWS WHAT WE BELIEVE – WHAT THE *CORRECT* WAY OF BELIEVING IS – RATHER THAN FIND OUT WHERE THEY ARE IN THEIR SPIRITUAL JOURNEY.

I THINK IN DOING SO, WE MISS OUT ON VERY VALUABLE OPPORTUNITIES TO SHARE OUR FAITH.

NOW THAT MAY SEEM PARADOXICAL.

WHEN WE THINK OF THE TERM “SHARING OUR FAITH,” WE AUTOMATICALLY THINK OF “TELLING.”

I THINK WE'D BE MUCH BETTER OFF “ASKING” & THEN LISTENING.

MAKING A SINCERE EFFORT TO DISCOVER WHERE SOMEONE IS IN THEIR FAITH WALK PROVIDES A MUCH BETTER OPPORTUNITY FOR OPEN DIALOGUE & CONVERSATION THAT WILL ENABLE US TO GROW TOGETHER IN OUR JOURNEY.

JESUS WAS A MASTER AT OPENING THAT KIND OF DIALOGUE.

TODAY, WE'LL LOOK AT A QUESTION JESUS ASKED OF THE DISCIPLES IN ONE OF THE MOST WELL-KNOWN PASSAGES IN THE GOSPELS.

WE'LL READ MARK'S VERSION, BUT IT'S FOUND IN ALL FOUR OF THE GOSPELS – MATTHEW, MARK, LUKE & JOHN.

IN FACT, IT'S THE ONLY MIRACLE OF JESUS THAT IS RECORDED IN ALL FOUR.

NOT ONLY THAT, BUT THERE ARE REALLY 6 ACCOUNTS OF EITHER THE SAME MIRACLE OR ONE THAT IS REMARKABLY SIMILAR.

MARK & MATTHEW RECORD TWO OTHER STORIES THAT ARE NEARLY THE SAME AS THIS ONE.

OUR SCRIPTURE READING IS MARK 6:30-44.

(After scripture)

WE'RE LOOKING AT “QUESTIONS JESUS ASKED,” BUT, OF COURSE, WE HAVE TO LOOK AT MORE THAN JUST THE QUESTIONS.

WE HAVE TO LOOK AT THE CONTEXT IN WHICH THOSE QUESTIONS WERE ASKED.

HERE WE FIND ONE OF THE MOST MEMORABLE, INSPIRING & HEARTWARMING STORIES IN THE ENTIRE BIBLE.

WE REMEMBER SONGS WE LEARNED ABOUT IT AS CHILDREN.

WE THINK OF THE GENEROSITY OF A LITTLE BOY WHO OFFERED HIS LUNCH TO BE USED TO FEED THE ENTIRE CROWD.

BUT, WAIT A MINUTE!

WHAT *ABOUT* THAT BOY?

HE WASN'T EVEN MENTIONED IN THE PASSAGE WE JUST READ.

NO, THAT NICE LITTLE LAD WITH THE BIG HEART ONLY APPEARS IN JOHN'S ACCOUNT OF THIS EVENT.

MATTHEW, MARK & LUKE DON'T MENTION HIM AT ALL.

NOR IS HE MENTIONED AS THE SOURCE OF FOOD IN EITHER OF THE OTHER 2 ACCOUNTS OF A SIMILAR MIRACLE – THE FEEDING OF THE 4,000 IN MATTHEW & MARK.

BEFORE LOOKING AT *THIS* MIRACLE, THOUGH, I'D LIKE TO TAKE A QUICK LOOK AT THAT ONE AS MARK RECORDS IT BECAUSE IT GIVES US, PERHAPS, THE VERY BEST EXAMPLE OF JESUS AS AN ASKER OF QUESTIONS.

IT'S FOUND JUST TWO CHAPTERS LATER – IN MARK EIGHT.

THINK ABOUT THIS A MOMENT.

WE HAVE THIS INCIDENT WE'VE JUST READ ABOUT & THEN – JUST 2 CHAPTERS LATER – JESUS DOES IT AGAIN.

ANOTHER DAY, ANOTHER CROWD, ANOTHER MIRACULOUS FEEDING.

AS THE DAY ENDS & JESUS AND THE DISCIPLES ARE GETTING INTO A BOAT TO SAIL TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SEA OF GALILEE, THE DISCIPLES ARE IN A PANIC.

THEY FORGOT TO BRING ANY FOOD WITH THEM!

THE FIRST THING ONE MIGHT SAY IS WHAT SOMEONE'S GRANDMOTHER SAID ABOUT ALL THESE MIRACULOUS FEEDING STORIES – *“YOU CAN TELL JESUS HUNG OUT WITH A BUNCH OF MEN BECAUSE THEY NEVER REMEMBERED TO PACK A LUNCH!”*

YOU MIGHT ALSO, THOUGH, LOGICALLY ASK WHAT HAPPENED WITH ALL THE LEFTOVERS BECAUSE IN THE FEEDING OF THE 4,000 – AS IN THE FEEDING OF THE 5,000 – THEY HAD A TON OF FOOD THAT WASN'T EATEN!

BUT IN THE 4,000 MIRACLE – AS JESUS IS IN THE BOAT WITH THE DISCIPLES & AS THEY'RE BEMOANING THE FACT THAT THEY HAVE NOTHING TO EAT – HIS EXASPERATION WITH THEM GETS THE BEST OF HIM AND IT COMES OUT IN QUESTIONS.

LISTEN TO THESE WORDS IN MARK 8 – THE PRIME EXAMPLE OF JESUS AS AN ASKER OF QUESTIONS –

“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? AND DO YOU NOT REMEMBER? WHEN I BROKE THE FIVE LOAVES FOR THE FIVE THOUSAND, HOW MANY BASKETS FULL OF BROKEN PIECES DID YOU COLLECT?’

THEY SAID TO HIM, ‘TWELVE.’

‘AND THE SEVEN FOR THE FOUR THOUSAND, HOW MANY BASKETS FULL OF BROKEN PIECES DID YOU COLLECT?’

AND THEY SAID TO HIM, 'SEVEN.'

THEN HE SAID TO THEM, 'DO YOU NOT YET UNDERSTAND?!'"

YOU THINK JESUS MIGHT HAVE BEEN A BIT FRUSTRATED WITH THESE GUYS!?

IT'S LIKE HE WANTS TO RAP THEM ON THE SKULL WITH A "HELLO?! DO YOU KNUCKLEHEADS STILL NOT GET IT?!"

DID YOU COUNT THE QUESTIONS JESUS ASKS THEM?

IT'S NINE!

IN 5 VERSES, HE ASKS 9 QUESTIONS!

IS IT ANY WONDER THAT WHEN YOU ADD UP ALL THE QUESTIONS JESUS ASKED IN THE GOSPELS, THE NUMBER IS MORE THAN 300?

BUT BACK TO THE PASSAGE WE'VE READ FOR TODAY & THE QUESTION ON WHICH WE'RE FOCUSING.

HERE THEY ARE – JESUS, THE DISCIPLES, THOUSANDS UPON THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE & VIRTUALLY NOTHING TO EAT.

THE DISCIPLES WANT TO SEND THE PEOPLE AWAY BECAUSE THEY KNOW THEY CAN'T FEED THEM ALL.

BUT JESUS WON'T HEAR OF IT.

"YOU GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO EAT," HE TELLS THEM.

"WE CAN'T DO IT," THEY TELL HIM.

THEY DON'T HAVE ENOUGH FOOD WITH THEM.

THEY DON'T HAVE ENOUGH MONEY TO GO BUY SOME.

THEY DON'T HAVE ENOUGH TIME TO GET TO THE CITY & BACK EVEN IF THEY DID.

THEY DON'T, THEY CAN'T & THEY WON'T.

AND HERE COMES THE QUESTION – THE QUESTION FROM JESUS THAT CHANGES EVERYTHING.

IT CHANGES EVERYTHING FOR THE DISCIPLES.

IT CHANGES EVERYTHING FOR THE MULTITUDES ON THE HILLSIDE.

IT CHANGES EVERYTHING FOR YOU & FOR ME.

"HOW MANY LOAVES HAVE YOU?"

"WHAT HAVE YOU GOT?" JESUS ASKS THEM.

IT'S A PITTANCE.

IT'S EMBARRASSING.

IT'S SUCH A MEAGER AMOUNT THAT IT WOULD BARELY FEED JESUS & THE DISCIPLES, LET ALONE A CROWD OF THOUSANDS.

BUT THEY GIVE IT TO HIM ANYWAY.

THEY GIVE TO HIM AND...LISTEN TO THIS.

HE BLESSES THE BREAD, BREAKS IT & GIVES IT TO HIS DISCIPLES.

NOW WHERE HAVE YOU HEARD THAT BEFORE?

MAYBE EVERY TIME YOU HAVE COMMUNION – WHETHER HERE OR ANYWHERE ELSE?
JESUS TAKES SOMETHING COMMON & TRANSFORMS IT INTO SOMETHING SPIRITUAL – SOMETHING
THAT’S MORE THAN WHAT MEETS THE EYE.

NOTICE THE ORDER OF THINGS HERE.

THE BREAD MOVES FROM THE DISCIPLES TO JESUS, BACK TO THE DISCIPLES & THEN TO THE HUNGRY
MULTITUDE.

ON THEIR OWN, THE DISCIPLES COULD DO NOTHING.

BUT WHEN THEY GAVE WHAT THEY HAD TO JESUS, IT WAS TRANSFORMED INTO SOMETHING
UNIMAGINABLY POWERFUL!

WHEN I WAS GROWING UP, MY BEST FRIEND WAS A GUY NAMED JOHNNY.

HE & HIS FAMILY MOVED INTO A HOUSE DIRECTLY BEHIND OURS WHEN WE WERE BOTH 7 YEARS OLD.
A FENCE SEPARATED OUR YARDS BUT AFTER WATCHING US JUMP OVER THE FENCE SEVERAL TIMES A
DAY FOR A FEW MONTHS, OUR DADS GOT TOGETHER & PUT A GATE IN FOR US.

JOHNNY & I WERE INSEPARABLE FOR YEARS.

WE WERE A GREAT TEAM.

WE WERE UNBEATABLE AS A TWO-MAN HOCKEY TEAM & WOULD TAKE ON ANY GROUP OF 2, 3 OR 4 IN THE
NEIGHBORHOOD.

I WAS THE GOALIE & JOHNNY PLAYED OUT.

I’D GIVE UP 11 GOALS BUT JOHNNY WOULD SCORE 12.

WE WON EVERY TIME – NOT BECAUSE OF MY GOALTENDING, BUT BECAUSE OF JOHNNY’S SCORING.

WE WERE ALSO THE TOUGHEST TANDEM IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD.

I COULDN’T FIGHT MY WAY OUT OF A PAPER BAG, BUT I WAS NEVER AFRAID OF ANYONE BECAUSE –
WHETHER JOHNNY WAS WITH ME OR NOT – NOBODY WOULD MESS WITH ME BECAUSE IF THEY DID, THEY KNEW
THEY’D HAVE TO ANSWER TO JOHNNY.

WHEN JESUS ASKS THE DISCIPLES HOW MANY LOAVES THEY HAVE, HE KNOWS WHAT THEY HAVE TO
OFFER IS MEAGER.

THEY HAVE VIRTUALLY NOTHING THAT COULD EVEN BEGIN TO FEED A MULTITUDE.

BUT WHEN THEY OFFER WHAT THEY HAVE, HE BLESSES IT & TRANSFORMS IT & GIVES IT BACK TO THEM
& THEY CAN DO MORE THAN THEY EVER DREAMED POSSIBLE.

HE ASKS YOU THE SAME QUESTION.

“HOW MANY LOAVES DO YOU HAVE?”

“WHAT HAVE YOU GOT?”

WHAT YOU HAVE TO GIVE IS A PITTANCE, ISN’T IT?

WHETHER WE'RE TALKING ABOUT YOUR FINANCIAL MEANS OR YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS OR YOUR SOCIAL SKILLS OR YOUR INTELLECTUAL ABILITY OR YOUR MANUAL TOOLS, WHAT YOU HAVE TO OFFER THE WORLD MAY NOT SEEM LIKE MUCH.

ON YOUR OWN, YOU'RE RIGHT.

WHAT YOU CAN OFFER IS A PITTANCE.

IT'S LIKE ME PLAYING HOCKEY OR DEFENDING MYSELF WITHOUT JOHNNY.

ON MY OWN, I HAD NOTHING.

BUT WHEN I WAS WITH JOHNNY, THERE WAS NO STOPPING US.

IT WASN'T BECAUSE OF ME BUT I HAD ENOUGH SENSE TO BE JOHNNY'S HOCKEY TEAMMATE OR TAG TEAM PARTNER.

JESUS ASKS "WHAT HAVE YOU GOT? GIVE IT TO ME & NO MATTER HOW MEAGER IT IS, TOGETHER WE'LL TURN IT INTO SOMETHING EXTRAORDINARY."

IT'S NOT ONLY TRUE OF US AS INDIVIDUALS, IT'S TRUE OF US AS A CHURCH.

I TALKED TO OUR SESSION RECENTLY ABOUT SOMETHING THAT I'VE OFTEN SHARED WITH OUR STAFF.

NOT LONG AFTER I BEGAN WORKING IN THE CHURCH, THE THOUGHT OCCURRED TO ME THAT, WITHIN THE CHURCH, WE CAN ANYTHING WE WANT TO DO.

I REALIZED THAT WITH THE GIFTS & SKILLS & COMMITMENT OF CHURCH MEMBERS & ULTIMATELY WITH THE POWER OF CHRIST BEHIND US, WE CAN DO VIRTUALLY ANYTHING!

IT WAS AN ASTOUNDING & LIBERATING REVELATION!

OVER THE YEARS, I'VE SEEN IT PROVEN AGAIN & AGAIN.

THERE ARE EXTRAORDINARY VISIONS THAT WE MIGHT HAVE FOR THIS CHURCH & THERE ARE VISIONS YOU MIGHT HAVE FOR YOUR OWN LIFE.

THOSE AREN'T OUR VISIONS OR YOUR VISIONS.

THEY'RE VISIONS THAT HAVE BEEN PLANTED WITHIN US & WITHIN YOU BY THE HOLY SPIRIT.

THOSE VISIONS ARE STIRRED WITHIN YOU WHEN YOU HEAR THE QUESTION OF JESUS, "WHAT HAVE YOU GOT?"

THOSE VISIONS CATCH HOLD WHEN YOU OFFER WHAT YOU HAVE – MEAGER AS IT IS.

THOSE VISIONS BECOME REALITY, WHEN JESUS BLESSES WHAT YOU'VE GIVEN, GIVES IT BACK TO YOU & WATCHES AS YOU USE YOUR GIFTS FOR THE GLORY OF GOD.

OF ALL 300 QUESTIONS JESUS ASKED, THERE ARE FEW – IF ANY – MORE IMPORTANT THAN THIS ONE.

EVERY DAY, WITH EACH NEW CHALLENGE & OPPORTUNITY PRESENTED IN YOUR LIFE, HE ASKS – "HOW MANY LOAVES HAVE YOU? WHAT HAVE YOU GOT?" AMEN.

*The Reverend Dr. Dennis R. Davenport
Eastminster Presbyterian Church
Evansville, Indiana*

