

The Mission of the Twelve

6:6b Then he went about among the villages teaching.

Jesus had already chosen twelve to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message and to have authority to cast out demons (3:14-15). He now activates that appointment sending them out two by two.

⁷ He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ⁸ He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; ⁹ but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. ¹⁰ He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. ¹¹ If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." ¹² So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. ¹³ They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

Jesus adds instruction on how they are to travel. They are to travel 'very light' submitting themselves to the risk of hospitality. The lightness in which they travel will show trust in divine authority given them and also ward off any suspicion of self-seeking. The mission of the 12 foreshadows the Church: 1] – always a community on mission 2] entrusted with the treasure of the gospel to share and 3] healing ministry carried out in the sacraments. How the Church is to imitate these first missionaries in the 'lightness' of their travel is far more of a problem – but our prophetic role is linked to the lightness of our travel and Pope Francis a great witness to that - trusting in hospitality, and lack of self-seeking.

Mark 6:10-11 *The instructions on the behaviour of the missionaries reflects the experience of the earliest missionary activity of the Christian communities. The shaking off the dust from the feet comes from the belief that Israel was God's "holy land." Returning from the impure lands which surrounded Israel, travellers would shake the dust from their feet. This gesture indicated the impurity and godlessness of the land they had just left, and the holiness of the land they were entering. The place that did not receive the missioner, or would not hear the proclamation of the gospel, was to be judged as "godless" by means of a symbolic shaking of the dust from the feet of the missionary.*

The Death of John the Baptist

¹⁴ King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some were^[as] saying, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him." ¹⁵ But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." ¹⁶ But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."

¹⁷ For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. ¹⁸ For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." ¹⁹ And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, ²⁰ for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him. ²¹ But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday

gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. ²² When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it." ²³ And he solemnly swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom." ²⁴ She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the baptizer." ²⁵ Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." ²⁶ The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. ²⁷ Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, ²⁸ brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. ²⁹ When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

³⁰ The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught.

v.30 This is the only time the "disciples" are called "apostles" in Mark. The word apostle means 'one sent' and it fits the context here since they had been "sent out" by Jesus in 6:7

From 6:7-13 We hear how Jesus who chose the 12 to be with him and share in his mission, sent the 12 out on their first mission with instructions as to what they were to do (he "gave them authority over the unclean spirits.") and that they were to "travel lightly."

Vv. 14-29 We hear the story of Herod wondering who Jesus is and of John the Baptist's beheading, and then v.30 we hear of the return of the apostles from their successful missionary journey.

Question: Why do we have the John the Baptist narrative in the middle of this missionary journey? Some see it as a kind of bridge between the twelve being sent out on mission and the miracle of the loaves that follows. Francis J. Moloney sees it as a Markan sandwich.

Jesus had promised a share in the mission to the twelve: "And he appointed twelve to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message, and to have authority to cast out demons" (3:14-15). The Twelve are missionaries of Jesus only in so far as they respond to the initiative of Jesus, remain with him, recognize that their authority to preach and cast out demons is from him. They remain at all times "followers" of Jesus, and never self-reliant agents. They now begin to share in this ministry: "He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits" (6:7). And the Gospel tells us: "So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them" (vv. 12-13). what must be noted is the inclusion of activities that were not part of their commission in v. 7. They were given authority over the unclean spirits. However, in vv. 12-13a, as well as casting out demons, they also preach conversion. The nature of their preaching is further specified in 6:12. They "preach that people should convert." This preaching of conversion reaches even more deeply into an association with the mission of Jesus. They took this role upon themselves.

*In V. 30 they return, and gather around Jesus to tell him all **they** had done. They “announce” their achievements to Jesus. This is a strong verb, generally used in contexts of public revelation. What must be noticed is the Twelve’s transferal of the authority for what they have done and said to themselves. They report in v. 30 “everything” that **they** did and everything that **they** said. This is to miss the point of their being sent by Jesus on a mission. The essential qualities of a true disciple have been made clear by means of the episode of the death of the Baptist (vv. 14-29: the middle of the sandwich). John the Baptist is the messenger of God, the one who announces Jesus. He has an unswerving commitment to his God-given mission. It has cost him his life. And his life and death have close parallels with the life and death of Jesus. The reader is aware that unconditional commitment to God’s design and being a follower of Jesus should mark the life of the Twelve, at present out on their mission (vv. 7-13). It is also made clear for the first time, by means of this interlude, that discipleship will cost no less than everything. As followers of Jesus, they are called to share in the destiny of Jesus. John’s martyrdom not only prefigured Jesus’ death, it also prefigures the death of anyone who would come after him! Not only are the Twelve authorized by Jesus, but like the Baptist, they are to accept the destiny which the following of Jesus necessarily brings. There is nothing of this in the report of the Twelve as they come back from their mission. They are unable to recognize that they have associated themselves with Jesus in a mission that has to do with the reigning presence of God, cost what it may. They come back flushed with their success, yet show that they have failed as disciples of Jesus.*

Feeding the Five Thousand

³¹ He said to them, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. ³² And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. ³³ Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. ³⁴ As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. ³⁵ When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, “This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; ³⁶ send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat.” ³⁷ But he answered them, “You give them something to eat.” They said to him, “Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?” ³⁸ And he said to them, “How many loaves have you? Go and see.” When they had found out, they said, “Five, and two fish.” ³⁹ Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰ So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. ⁴¹ Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. ⁴² And all ate and were filled; ⁴³ and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. ⁴⁴ Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.

Being 'like sheep without a shepherd' is a biblical expression to describe the people of Israel being neglected or suffering under bad rulers or religious leaders. Jesus, in contrast, reveals himself as a true shepherd by caring and looking after them – first teaching and then feeding them. It prefigures the later ministry of the Church both in word and sacrament.

The miraculous feeding of thousands of people in the wilderness is told six times across all the four gospels (Mark 6:32-44; Mark 8:1-10; Matthew 14:13-21; Matthew 15:32-39; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-13). The story obviously had immense meaning for the early Christian community. The feeding looks back to the Exodus traditions where God fed and cared for his wandering people in the desert, and it looks forward to the Eucharist instituted by Jesus and celebrated in the Christian communities, and looking forward still further it anticipates the banquet in the final Kingdom. The words used in the feeding of the thousands have eucharistic overtones: "takes", "blesses", "breaks", "gives". These actions have their origins in the early Christian liturgical practices and Mark's words will remind them of their own eucharistic celebrations.

The episode closes with a note that five thousand "men" had eaten the loaves. The focus on the male reflects the patriarchy of the ancient world. They are the ones who count and are thus numbered. No malice is intended and the figure is simply meant to show the immensity of the crowd and the greatness of the miracle.

'The narrative provides many options for actualization. One way not to actualise the passage is to say that the people were so moved by the preaching of Jesus that they divided their food with others. This "nice thought" interpretation goes back to the nineteenth-century rationalistic attack on miracles but has now achieved a strong foothold in mainline Christian preaching. Rather, the narrative offers a picture of Jesus as compassionate towards the leaderless people and concerned about their physical hunger. A Church that invokes the name of Jesus must be concerned about the spiritual and physical hungers of people today. The location in a desolate place evokes God's care of the Jewish people during the wilderness wanderings. Since Vatican II has chosen "pilgrim people" as one of the central metaphors for the church, this aspect of the narrative can readily be actualised. Those Christian groups that see a eucharistic reference here might reflect that the narrative combines Jesus' teaching with his provision of food. Vatican II recaptures this double dimension of the narrative when it speaks of the Eucharist in terms of "both the word of God and the body of Christ" (Dei Verbum 21). This formulation counters an over emphasis on the automatic effect of eucharistic presence, which itself is mediated by faith in the word of Jesus.' [THE GOSPEL OF MARK. SACRA PAGINA SERIES VOL 2. JOHN R DONAHUE SJ AND DANIEL J HARRINGTON SJ, P 211]

Jesus Walks on the Water

⁴⁵ Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. ⁴⁶ After saying farewell to them, he went up on the mountain to pray.

⁴⁷ When evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. ⁴⁸ When he saw that they were straining at the oars against an adverse wind, he came towards them early in the morning, walking on the sea. He intended to pass them by. ⁴⁹ But when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost

and cried out; ⁵⁰ for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." ⁵¹ Then he got into the boat with them and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, ⁵² for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

Jesus makes his disciples go on ahead to Bethsaida by boat while he dismisses the crowds and goes up the mountain to pray. As evening falls, he is alone on land and they at sea and he could see they were struggling against a heavy wind but it is not until a time between 3 and 6 in the morning that he comes to them walking on the surface 'intending to pass them by'. The disciples who have witnessed much to this point, including the calming of the stormy sea (4:35-41) are to be challenged. Jesus is deliberately not coming to their aid. The disciples continue to show their inability to grasp who it is that they are following. They think they are seeing a ghost and cry out in fear. Mark emphasises that they had all seen him and were terrified (v.50a). What they see though is "nothing less than Jesus as a personal revelation of God, the God who created the world out of primeval watery chaos (Gen 1:2-3), and saved Israel by parting the waters of the sea (Ps 77:16-20). The final element of revelation comes with his words of reassurance "Be of good heart; it is I (ego eimi); fear not" (v.50d). On a surface level the Greek phrase ego eimi is a simple self-identification such as anyone might make when surprising a person in the dark. In the context of a further biblical motif going back to Moses' experience at the burning bush (Exod 3:14) it is a solemn expression of the divine presence and power to save (Deut 32:39; Is 43:10; 41:4)" (Byrne p. 118)

The appearance of Jesus in this form leaves them "utterly astounded"(51b). Mark tells his readers why this is so: "for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened" (v.52). Mark provides an initial explanation for the developing picture of disciples who are failing. They have been drawn into the circle/new family of Jesus (3:3:19) and sent out to continue his mission (6:7-13) and they were actively involved in Jesus' ministry in the first story of the miraculous feeding (6:31-44). But they were unable to understand that the kingdom of God was manifesting itself in the words and deeds of Jesus. Up to this point only the Pharisees have been described as suffering from hardness of heart (3:15). In both miracles of the sea (4:40-41; 6:51-52) the disciples have shown their unbelief. They are now being linked with opposite side and their hardness of heart will be the principal thing Jesus has to deal with until the passion. While they will remain his collaborators, they will fail to grasp, to understand.

The use of the passive to indicate that their hearts were hardened raises an important question: who is responsible for this hardening? – Influence of Satan or part of God's design?

[Further developed – see. Brendan Byrne p. 117ff; Francis J Moloney Mark p. 133ff ; Donahue-Harrington p212ff]

Healing the Sick in Gennesaret

⁵³ When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. ⁵⁴ When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, ⁵⁵ and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶ And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in

the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

This is an extended summary. Unlike the disciples the people recognized him at once, and their trust contrasts with the disciples fear crying out in terror, astonishment, lack of understanding and hardness of heart. They believe that touching the fringe of his cloak would bring healing.

Conflict: Jesus and the Tradition of Israel

7 Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, **2** they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. **3** (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; **4** and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles. **5** So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?" **6** He said to them, "Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honours me with their lips,

but their hearts are far from me;

7 in vain do they worship me,

teaching human precepts as doctrines.'

8 You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition."

9 Then he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition! **10** For Moses said, 'Honour your father and your mother'; and, 'Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must surely die.' **11** But you say that if anyone tells father or mother, 'Whatever support you might have had from me is Corban' (that is, an offering to God)— **12** then you no longer permit doing anything for a father or mother, **13** thus making void the word of God through your tradition that you have handed on. And you do many things like this."

14 Then he called the crowd again and said to them, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand: **15** there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile."

17 When he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about the parable. **18** He said to them, "Then do you also fail to understand? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile, **19** since it enters, not the heart but the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) **20** And he said, "It is what comes out of a person that defiles. **21** For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, **22** adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. **23** All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

The enthusiasm of the crowds as he stepped ashore (summary above 6:53-56) is contrasted here with hostility of the religious authorities who reappear on the scene. The scribes and Pharisees judge the eating habits of some of the disciples as unclean.

(Some commentators suggest that there is a division shown among the disciples here. If some were eating in a manner that could be judged as defiled, some were not, and it is to the group of divided disciples, and so to Markan readership, that the pronouncements of Jesus that follow are addressed)

The controversy about “clean” and “unclean”. The legal prescriptions stem from the sense of Israel being a holy people living before God in a holy land with a holiness that must be preserved when ‘injured’ through contact with what is alien and unholy. The Pharisaic aim was that the Jewish people should live out their vocation to be the holy people of God in a mixed society that was the Palestine of Jesus’ day. They developed a whole body of tradition – washing hands one of them. Here (v.5) the Pharisees and scribes seem to presuppose that Jesus shares their view of a binding oral law when they complain that some of his disciples go against the “tradition of the elders” by eating bread with unwashed hands. Jesus will have none of it, and goes on the offensive, broadening the issue from washing of hands before eating to an assault on the “tradition” to which they have appealed. He quotes scripture telling them they are “teaching human precepts as doctrines” abandoning the commandment of God in favour of human traditions. (vv.7-8). Jesus then substantiates the accusation by citing the example of a tradition that seems to go against the Torah [= the law of God as revealed to Moses and recorded in the first five books of the Hebrew scriptures (the Pentateuch)]. Their practice is an example of setting aside the word or will of God in favour of their tradition. Jesus substantiates his claim by citing a case where the tradition appears to subvert the Torah. Honour your father and mother was the law and people exempt themselves from this law by declaring their property “corban,” that is vowed to the temple treasury and so unusable for parental support.

Jesus then turns to the crowd telling them ¹⁵ “there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.” Jesus is asked by his disciples to explain what this means. Jesus is not against the Torah but is perhaps asking the question: what is more important, ritual cleanliness or moral cleanliness. What defiles a person is moral impurity and not ritual impurity. “Cleanness” or holiness is primarily a matter of the heart.

Note: 1 *Jesus’ words to his disciples: “Then do you also fail to understand?” (v.18) His disciples yet again failing.*

2 V.19b *(Thus he declared all foods clean.) The early Church, rooted in Judaism, had to gradually understand what, from their Jewish tradition was necessary to hold on to and what could be let go. What laws should they pass on to pagans becoming members. Laws concerning food and circumcision were both discussed and caused problems (Galatians 2, Acts 10, 11, 15)*

3 *Jesus has stressed moral purity, and what comes from the heart. He has touched and been touched by those regarded as ritually impure/ unclean (Leper 1:40; woman with the haemorrhage and Jairus’ daughter 5:21-43) with Jesus is about to enter pagan territory again. He redefined holiness and being part of God’s holy people. For the early Church an issue arose as to where the limits of God’s holy people stood, where lines were to be drawn. Could it include non-Jewish, formerly “unclean” pagan Gentiles? In what follows Jesus enters pagan territory where he meets a pagan woman of great faith which is the first of scenes involving this issue.*

The Syrophenician Woman's Faith

²⁴ From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, ²⁵ but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. ²⁶ Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷ He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." ²⁸ But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." ²⁹ Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter." ³⁰ So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

This is a passage that presents difficulties. We don't expect that kind of reaction or language from Jesus to a woman in distress asking for help. When reading this passage (and others) remember that Mark is writing for his community who were having difficulties and issues with where the limits of a believing community was drawn. Could it include non-Jewish, formerly unclean Gentiles? Think of our own context today...we can speak of Christian community, but racism, class distinction, etc affects our relationships with Church 'community'. Our Church can make tight boundaries around itself and can be challenged from outsiders, people who feel 'excluded' who, under the prompting of God's inclusive grace, seek access to its treasures.

*The woman has a daughter possessed by an unclean spirit and hearing Jesus is present she responds "immediately" and prostrates herself before him which parallels the actions of Jairus and the woman with the flow of blood 5:21-43 She is a gentile character showing faith. She begs Jesus to cast the demon from her daughter. Jesus reply is of a harshness unparalleled in the Gospels. Dogs were considered unclean in the Palestine of Jesus' day. To call someone a dog was a great insult, and yet Jews did refer to Gentiles considered unclean in such terms. Jesus initial reaction is to maintain the priority of the mission to Israel. This resistance on the part of Jesus matches the resistance of the early Christian church. There may have been some in the Markan community who shared sentiments similar to those expressed by Jesus. But the encounter between Jesus and the Syrophenician woman doesn't stop there. The rhetoric of the passage read in a community where many were uncertain about the presence of Gentiles at the Christian table, would have been powerful. The woman seizes Jesus' image to exploit it to her own advantage. Her 'yes sir,' accepts the Jewish priority but she points out that the house dogs under the table manage to get the scraps that fall. (v25). In her nothingness, she comes with complete openness to Jesus. She recognises that she brings nothing to the meal, addressed Jesus as "Lord" and asks to sit under the table to be fed with crumbs which fall from the meal Jesus has prepared for the nourishment of Israel Her wit and faith bring about complete change. Jesus tells her to go on her way. The demon has already left her daughter. She **trusts in his word** and goes. This Syrophenician woman, a Gentile, is, for all generations, including ourselves, a model of the 'outsider' who challenges readers against setting limits to those who would or should be called daughters and sons of God.*

Jesus Cures a Deaf Man

³¹ Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. ³² They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. ³³ He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. ³⁴ Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." ³⁵ And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. ³⁶ Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. ³⁷ They were astounded beyond measure, saying, "He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

Jesus is in a Gentile area. Both the man healed and those who bring him to Jesus are gentiles.

The words (v37) after the healing: "he has done all things well...", refer to Isaiah 35:5,6 – key text serving for messianic age. These people from the Decapolis, like the Syrophenician woman foreshadow all those gentiles who will gain access to the riches of the Jewish Messiah.

Jesus has broken through a barrier closed to the Gentiles (7:24-30 – Syrophenician woman) and here (v.37) the Gentiles are the first people to publicly recognise Jesus' messianic potential. The disciples have not been part of the action across these two stories, but the last time they appeared they were described by Jesus as "without understanding" (v.18 above). The Syrophenician woman showed signs of a true believer and the Gentiles from the Decapolis region uses words that suggest Jesus might be the Messiah. There is a contrast between the privileged disciples (see 1:16-20; 3:13-14; 6:7-13) and characters from the Gentile world. The theme of the fragility of the disciples faith has been emerging in the narrative

Feeding the Four Thousand

⁸ In those days when there was again a great crowd without anything to eat, he called his disciples and said to them, ² "I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. ³ If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way—and some of them have come from a great distance." ⁴ His disciples replied, "How can one feed these people with bread here in the desert?" ⁵ He asked them, "How many loaves do you have?" They said, "Seven." ⁶ Then he ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground; and he took the seven loaves, and after giving thanks he broke them and gave them to his disciples to distribute; and they distributed them to the crowd. ⁷ They had also a few small fish; and after blessing them, he ordered that these too should be distributed. ⁸ They ate and were filled; and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. ⁹ Now there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away. ¹⁰ And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.

This miracle takes place in Gentile territory. The language used foreshadows the Eucharist. They ate and were satisfied – foreshadowing the messianic age. The disciples continue to display their lack of understanding both of who Jesus is and what he is able to do. They ask: “How can one feed these people with bread here in the desert?” (v.4). They had learned nothing from their association with Jesus’ earlier feeding of the multitude with bread (see 6:30ff).

The Demand for a Sign

¹¹ The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, asking him for a sign from heaven, to test him. ¹² And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, “Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to this generation.”

Their intent is hostile – we might wonder why after his many miracles. The demand for a sign will recur as Jesus hangs on the Cross (15:32) After this and in following few chapters the principle context will be with misunderstanding on the part of his disciples.

The Yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod

¹³ And he left them, and getting into the boat again, he went across to the other side. ¹⁴ Now the disciples had forgotten to bring any bread; and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. ¹⁵ And he cautioned them, saying, “Watch out—beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod.” ¹⁶ They said to one another, “It is because we have no bread.” ¹⁷ 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? ¹⁸ Do you have eyes, and fail to see? Do you have ears, and fail to hear? And do you not remember? ¹⁹ 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.” ²⁰ “And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?” And they said to him, “Seven.” ²¹ Then he said to them, “Do you not yet understand?”

We arrive now at the last of three boat scenes that play a key role in revealing both Jesus’ identity and the disciples’ difficulty in coming to terms with it. This brings to a climax the theme/ pattern of the disciples’ spiritual incomprehension. Their blindness will occupy the central section of the Gospel 8:22 – 10:52. A frustrated Jesus reprimands them with questions.

What should they have deduced from the repeated feedings? What should it have revealed about Jesus? They reveal Jesus as the one through whom God is providing both for Israel and Gentiles (outsiders) the hospitality of the Kingdom, and with a generosity (seen in the leftovers) that is divine. 5 Loaves supplied more than enough for 5000, and 7 for 4000. How could they have problems with one loaf among them, and Jesus present.

What is the leaven of the Pharisees and that of Herod? The Pharisees have displayed a hardness of heart: restrictive barriers of the old era shown in attitudes (sinners/ just/ fasting/ celebration / Sabbath/ human need (ch 2) clean/ unclean (7:1-5) seeking a sign in spite of having seen so many miracles etc. They are out to trap Jesus. They are not open – they show hardness of hearts.

Herod represents corrupt worldly cruel power completely different to path Jesus takes as messianic king.

Jesus says to his disciples: "Do you not remember?"..... To remember. Mark is writing for his community and they must remember. They must share in the universal mission of Jesus, cost what it may (6:14-19 above). An important part of the mission was fellow, and eucharistic fellowship. The community was to provide bread for many different people, Jews and Gentiles. Not to do so shows lack of understand and hardness of heart. The problem of table fellowship was widespread in the early Church, and in the Markan community and they are asked: "Do you not remember....Do you not understand?"(vv. 18c,21)...They are asked....and so are we. Disciples (and we) must guard against such 'leaven' if following Jesus.

Jesus Cures a Blind Man at Bethsaida

²² They came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him. ²³ He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, "Can you see anything?" ²⁴ And the man^{bl} looked up and said, "I can see people, but they look like trees, walking." ²⁵ Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. ²⁶ Then he sent him away to his home, saying, "Do not even go into the village."

"Following a story where Jesus accuses his disciples of blindness (v. 18a), this miracle tells of a man who moves from no sight (v. 22), to limited vision (vv. 23-24) to full sight (v. 26). This miracle looks back to the blindness of the disciples (v. 18) and forward to the episode which follows, closing the first half of the gospel, where two of these stages of "sight" will be realised (8:27-30). It also opens the door for the second half of the gospel (8:31-25:47) during which the nature of full sight will be explained by the teaching and death of Jesus."

[Moloney p 163]

Peter's Declaration about Jesus

²⁷ Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" ²⁸ And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." ²⁹ He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." ³⁰ And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

*We are at the chief turning point in Mark's Gospel. The issue that has existed from the start, "Who is this person, armed with such striking power to teach, to heal and to set free?" is about to be resolved, at least for the disciples. In Peter (v 29) they recognise him as the Christ, the Messiah, something known to the reader and the demonic world. But Peter, like the blind man (v.22ff) is only partially correct, his eyes are not fully open to the truth about Jesus. The disciple are yet to come to full sight. They have to cope with a further revelation: **that precisely as Messiah and God's "Beloved Son" he is destined to suffer and to die.** (8:31-33). Jesus' sustained and largely unsuccessful attempt to communicate this deeper truth about his person and his mission to his disciples forms the main agenda of the journey to Jerusalem – our*

next section 8:31-10:52. The journey to Jerusalem will approach its end with a similar cure of a blind man (Bartimaeus) in Jericho (10:42-50). The two cures of the physically blind men 'frame' Jesus' sustained attempt to cure the disciples' blindness.