

THE CONFIDENCE TRAP 9 – A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF MARK
MARK 6:35-52
November 20, 2016

My friends, it's that time of year again. It's time to buy the turkey, it's time to turn on the oven and it's time to pull out the sweatpants or anything with an elastic waist, anything to make room for the average turkey day consumption of 4,500 calories. That's right, the average consumption is 4,500 calories, 3,000 for the meal and 1,500 for nibbling and snacking. That is not even the most important part. A recent survey found that over 65% of Americans feel that leftovers are more important than the actual meal. That's right, the majority of us are more excited about casseroles and turkey legs on day two than day one.

For some reason leftovers are important to us. They are one of those things you can take for granted. I understand why we like leftovers. When you eat leftovers, it's so easy to reach into the fridge and you don't have to worry about all the work and cleanup that went into the meal as you easily heat them up in the microwave. When you eat leftovers, you don't have to worry about navigating the crowds at the store, the cost at checkout or the hours in the kitchen. Leftovers are great because they are almost no work, no cost, no stress and they are delicious.

Believe it or not, leftovers are key to our story today. If you understand leftovers, you will understand this story. Our passage today is really two stories, but they are interconnected. Jesus is going to miraculously feed 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish, and there will be leftovers. Then he is going to walk on water and meet the disciples while they are out in the middle of the sea. When Jesus hops into the boat, something strange happens.

Mark 6: 45-52

The disciples were afraid and then astounded. Here is the strange part to me. It says they were astounded because they saw a man walk on water? No. They were astounded because

a man walked on water and then calmed the winds down? No. For some strange reason, it says they were astounded because they did not understand about the loaves?

There are leftovers in this story, and they seem to be integral to understanding Jesus. There is some theological power in comprehending the leftovers. If you are like the disciples and me you are probably confused too. What do leftovers have to do with walking on water and calming the storm? What do leftovers have to do with understanding Jesus?

We are in the latter stages of our series going through the first half of the Gospel of Mark. We have called this series, *The Confidence Trap*, as an exploration of what we think we know about God. That sometimes in this book when the disciples are more certain, they are the most off base. When the Pharisees know what they know about God, they are usually dead wrong. This gospel is full of Jesus' undermining what people think they know about who God is and how he works. The gospel is full of Jesus taking people on a whole new path of understanding God. That's why he was so revolutionary and also why he was so controversial.

Most prophets came along and told people to ratchet up their beliefs. To believe more. To work harder. To get more intense in their understanding and obedience to God. Then Jesus comes along and deflates their obsession with keeping the Sabbath. Jesus comes along and says God is like a father who runs out to meet his prodigal child, not an angry deity with lightening bolts waiting to strike us down. He is a God who delights in us, not one who is disgusted with us and constantly demanding we jump through more hoops to gain his approval.

Sadly today the same mindsets are prevalent. Many people are stuck on a treadmill of approval and worry before God. They picture God as an angry prudish man with a beard who is constantly shaking his head and upset with what humanity has gotten up to. He is a God that demands strict adherence to rules and rituals and is waiting to strike us down whenever we goof up or fall short. So, we must work, and grovel, and worry and stress and prove ourselves.

Today, I want to remind you what the real gift of Jesus is, and it has everything to do with leftovers.

As a quick side note, I want to give you an insight about how to read the Bible because in a sermon like this, we are taking different stories and mashing them together. Sometimes you can listen to a sermon or Bible study and wonder about the exegetical gymnastics or word games. I want to remind you that the Bible is deep and layered, and all you have to do is keep your eyes open, especially in Mark. We have discussed the idea of the Markan Sandwich before in which Mark aligns the stories or records them in a way where one story is used to comment on another. In a simpler term, this is juxtaposition.

The tips for you today are simple. Open your eyes and see a bigger story. Look for recurring themes. Today's passage is easy to spot because the "walking on water" story concludes with an allusion to the loaves. He is letting you know the stories are interconnected. However, I don't want you to constantly be looking for secret understandings and deeper meanings, but sometimes they are there. Especially in a passage like this where the juxtaposition and interconnected themes are evident. The Bible has a lot of stories to tell, and the one today is about the importance of leftovers. Let me give you a little background to this story.

Exodus 16: 4-5

God is making provision for his people here. He is going to literally drop bread from the sky. But this story isn't about food because this passage goes on to say they will need to gather it anew each day, a portion for that day and that day only. Except on the sixth day, they are to take a double portion. Why? So they will not need to gather food on the Sabbath. Five days a week, gather a portion of food enough for you and your family. No more. There will be no leftovers. On the sixth day, gather enough for days six and seven, so you can rest on the seventh day.

God designs a system that will foster dependence and a relationship. People will need to do a daily ritual, and they will need to trust that he will always provide for them. This isn't a story about bread. It is a story about the nature of God. God cares for us and truly loves us, and it is a story about how we relate to God.

Exodus 16: 12-18

Things seem to be going well, but that rarely lasts.

Exodus 16: 19-20

Hunger often exposes who we really are. Our appetites often expose what really satisfies us. God has given the Israelites a clear set of directions for the gathering of food, and for some people that is not enough. They try to gather more so they won't have to do again tomorrow. Or maybe they do it so they can sell it. We don't know why, but it becomes clear, they start to make their relationship with God about the work and the cost and the stress. There is not dependence or relationship. They think that it's up to them. They don't trust in the nature of who God is. Instead of seeing manna as a gift, they made it into a burden.

In this passage, Moses' anger isn't about picking up extra manna. It is the story the food tells, that God isn't trustworthy. That he might not provide again or worse, maybe, that you want to take advantage of what he has offered. It paints an interesting picture.

Here is what I want you to see; in a few short chapters, the Israelites will receive the law, the Ten Commandments and the rituals, the cleansing and the sacrificial system. A big part of this system is coming daily for a fresh provision from God. A little more work to connect with God, regular festivals and sacrifices. Now keep in mind, the law is not bad and the sacrificial system isn't bad, but the Israelites ended up making them bad. They become a burden and not a gift. Paul says the law was a custodian, something to point us towards God and prepare our hearts for Jesus.

The law and the sacrificial system were meant to foster a relationship and appropriate dependence, but they became a mechanism, a process to be checked off. Like an Israelite wandering around looking for extra manna, so too would their future kin mechanically participate in the sacrificial system. Instead of the law being designed for their flourishing and growth where they were amazed by God's provision, they instead turned it into a system to be worked. Like a person mindlessly chewing their food, they did not savor God.

That brings us to the paradigm shift. God reached out and provided for us something to satisfy our stomachs and our souls, but instead of a meal to be savored, it became nutrition-less fast food. So God reached further out to us.

Mark 6: 30-44

Jesus miraculously feeds 5,000 people, which is amazing itself. Have you ever thought about the leftovers? Our Life Group meets on Sunday nights, and we take turns with each couple cooking the main dish. I really have not had much experience with this. Cooking for 10 adults and 10+ kids is hard to gauge how much people will eat and if the kids will like it or not like it. So, I usually try to err on the side of making too much. You don't want a mob of hungry children and grumpy adults. You could look at this and see Jesus looking at 5,000 people and just trying to not undershoot it.

I think you know there are no mistakes with Jesus. Everything has a purpose. Even food tells a story. When it comes to Jesus, there are leftovers. Twelve baskets. Does that number sound familiar? We have twelve disciples and twelve tribes. That number is representative of humanity and the way God has a relationship with them. In this moment, there is enough for everyone to be satisfied and there are leftovers.

In the Old Covenant, people came to God daily. With their sacrifices and their law. Each day, it was a task to be done, like manna to be picked up. Then Jesus comes with leftovers. He comes with an abundance, enough to satisfy you and more to spill over. Jesus is clarifying what was previously misunderstood. God the Father is the God of leftovers. He is the God of

abundance. Manna was meant to build a relationship, but it became a burden instead of a gift. People turned it into work instead of a gift.

Sixty five percent of Americans look forward to Thanksgiving leftovers, but they often approach them different ways. Some people make sandwiches with turkey and cranberry sauce. Some people make egg rolls with potatoes and ham. It's not about the form the leftovers take that I think is so important, it's the idea. The idea that when you are gathered in a big house with lots of hungry people that no matter what, there will be some tomorrow. There is a comfort in that. The food is already paid for. There is no more cost, no more work, no more stress, just leftovers to be enjoyed.

I want you to take note of a recurring set of themes in our passage today. Our passage today picks up after the disciples have been out preaching and healing. They have come back to him to report all they have done. Did you notice what Jesus does in verses 30-32. He tells them to rest from the work. He sees they are worn out, emotionally, physically, spiritually, and he tells them to rest.

The theme picks up again when Jesus sees the crowd. Jesus has compassion on them and begins to feed their souls with teaching. Then he feeds their bodies with the miraculous meal. He sees their exhaustion and tells them to rest. He sees their hunger and then gives them something to eat.

Finally in the episode on the boat, verse 48 says he saw them and they were making difficult headway. The wind was against them. Maybe they were rowing, maybe just trying to take the right tact and nothing was working out. Jesus sees how much work they are doing and he stops. He stills the storm. He sees their exhaustion and he offers them rest. He sees their hunger and gives them food. He sees their exertion and he calms their storm.

Back to our original query, what do leftovers have to do with walking on water and stilling the storm? What do leftovers have to do with the nature of God? Everything.

This all goes back to Exodus 16. What they didn't understand about the loaves was that their old mindset still reigned supreme. Manna was work and not a gift. God was reluctant and begrudging in his approach to humanity. Jesus shows them something different. Yahweh is the God of leftovers. It was never meant to seem like work. It was never meant to seem like stress. God is abundant and extravagant in his love and his grace.

Later Jesus says, "I am the bread that comes down from heaven. I am the thing that satisfies you, and I make enough for leftovers. There is always enough to go around." Later Jesus is going to tell the listeners that if they want to follow him, they need to drink his blood and eat his flesh. That's not a weird cannibalistic moment. Jesus is telling them this during the Passover week. Surely they know that the Passover lamb that saved them when they came out of slavery was slain and then they ate its flesh.

Jesus is foreshadowing his own death as the Passover lamb and telling all of them to partake and be saved. You have probably heard that before but don't miss this, Jesus brings enough for leftovers. His grace spills over. The work has been done. There is no more daily collecting of manna, just full provision with plenty of leftovers. This is the new covenant.

No longer do you need to daily strive and go through the motions of the sacrificial system. There is grace, and there is enough to go around. And there are leftovers.

Here is why this is so important. Some of you are getting up for manna each day. You feel the weight of legalism or moralism and feel like each new day you are starting back at zero. An empty stomach, and you need to work/strive and do to make God happy. For those who have partaken of Jesus, the work is over, and there is enough to go around. There are leftovers.

For some of you today, guilt is killing you. Shame is killing you. Like the Israelites, you were set free but you sometimes long for your slavery. At one point, they beg to go back to their slavery. Some of you have addictions and hang-ups, and you are living in a perpetual cycle of guilt.

Do not miss this today, God does not love you based on your performance. God's barometer of happiness with you does not go up and down based on your sin count from this past week. Your Father loves you deeply and madly. Not for what you will be, but for who you are. He is not angry. He is not seething and shaking his head. He loves you where you are. There is enough grace to go around. There are leftovers.

With that said, I am not advocating for cheap grace or grace gone wild. We are called to sanctification, the process of trying to look more and more like Jesus. But when you mess up, don't live in shame. Confession and repentance are all that are necessary. Taste and see that God is good. He may discipline you to keep you from destructive behaviors, addictions that may be killing you, hang-ups that are crushing your family. We serve a God of abundance. We serve a God of leftovers. One who will fill in where we fall short. One who will satisfy all of our hungers. The question for you today is, have you tasted and seen that the Lord is good? Have you come to appreciate that you are deeply loved and that the Christian life is not one of guilt and shame? If you are in a bad place today, I have a simple action for you to undertake, share a meal with a fellow believer. Confess if you need to. Repent if you need to. Allow another person to feed your soul. Allow God through them to satisfy you. Order a big dish and take home some leftovers.

There are whole websites dedicated to giving advice for thanksgiving leftovers. One site goes item by item to let you know how long you keep items in the fridge and freezer. Cranberry sauce can last well in your fridge for 2 weeks while gravy is only good for a couple days. Mashed potatoes freeze well for almost a year and still taste the same, while stuffing can turn a corner real quick. The funniest part of this website is at the bottom, there is an asterisk saying the freezer dates are for best use only but as a reminder, freezer leftovers will last indefinitely. The reminder here for me is twofold, 1) unfortunately, we develop rules even when it comes to leftovers. 2) If you receive them, leftovers never fail.

If you have walked away from the table of faith, I want to remind you that we serve the God of leftovers, the God of abundance, the God whose grace spills over in excess. The good

news about leftovers is that the price has already been paid and the work has already been done. This is good news.