

CHALLENGE: Trusting God in the Crisis (Mark 6:30-56) – Sunday, Nov 1, 2009 – Summit EFC

Series: *Way to Go: Serving & Giving Like Jesus* (Gospel of Mark), Message #8 – Pastor Doug Corlew

Let's open our Bibles to the 6th chapter of **Mark's** Gospel as we continue our *Way to Go* series. Some of you may be in the midst of a crisis today, and for some of us, a crisis may be just around the corner. That may not be the **WAY** *we* would choose **TO GO**. But there is nothing like a crisis to test and to grow your faith. That's what the disciples are going to learn in today's passage. Are you ready for the **challenge**?

Last week we saw how Jesus sent His twelve apostles out on the road for their first missions trip. And though they did face some rejection, they also saw some exciting results: repentance, deliverance, healing. They were ambassadors of Christ, and His power was operating through their ministry! These guys must have been flying high and ready to take on the world! What would Jesus have for them next?!

6:30-31 - *The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. 31 And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.*

Mark's gospel is sometimes called the "Go-Gospel" because it's action-oriented and fast-paced. But Mark also emphasizes the importance of slowing down now and then, to care for our own souls before continuing a ministry to others. It's great to be on the go, but "beware the barrenness of a busy life." It's been a frantic few weeks for the disciples, and Jesus says, "It's time to re-charge our batteries."

Has *your* life also been going at break-neck speed lately? I received an email this week with this message: *Got stopped for speeding the other day. I thought I could talk my way out of it until the cop looked at my dog in the back seat.* Have you seen this picture?... Are you ready? OK, here you go:

Here's one sign you're driving too fast! Even the claw marks on the upholstery tell you something! Just look at the eyes on that poor dog! Maybe that's how you would look to God if He slammed on the brakes in your life right now! Jesus doesn't want this to happen to His followers –

So He calls them to slow down for some solitude and rest. **32** - *And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves.* Unfortunately, sometimes vacations don't always go as planned, right?

33 – *Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.* So people recognize that familiar sail on the boat of the miracle-workers as they journey across the lake. And full of expectations, the crowds actually beat them to their destination. How would *you* have reacted to this intrusion? I mean, come on, can't a guy have a day off around here?!

34 – *When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things.* It could have been so tempting to hide from all these people, or tell them to come back later. But Jesus cared about them. He knew the value of each soul, so *He began to teach them many things.*

But the lesson here at the end of this day would be just as much for His disciples as the crowds. In fact, Jesus is about to challenge the faith of these 12 men like they've never been challenged before. And how is He going to do that? He's going to deliberately put them now in two crisis situations.

If you're going through a crisis of some kind today, let me ask you: Could it be that God has orchestrated the circumstances of your life as a call or a summons to grow in your faith and trust Him as never before?

Here in **Mark 6** Jesus performs a couple miracles to demonstrate that He is entirely trustworthy, and two blessings await those who keep their focus on Him in the midst of their struggles.

1st, there is **SUFFICIENCY**. When you trust God in the crisis, you find that His provision is always sufficient for your need. This is the lesson the disciples learn in **v 35-44** – *And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, “This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. 36 Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.” 37 But he answered them, “You give them something to eat.” And they said to him, “Shall we 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 do you have? Go and see.” And when they had found out, they said, “Five, and two fish.” 39 Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. 40 So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. 41 And taking the five loaves and the two fish he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all. 42 And they all ate and were satisfied. 43 And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. 44 And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men.*

I think the disciples initially react to this crisis like any of us would have reacted, don't you? They come up with a very reasonable suggestion: “It's late; we have a lot of hungry people here, and no food.

So let's dismiss them now so they can disperse to the surrounding villages before this crisis escalates. It may not be an ideal solution, but it's better than doing nothing.” Sounds level-headed to me.

But Jesus has a different idea. “You give them something to eat.” What? Are you kidding us, Jesus? This is not only impractical, it's impossible! So rather than relieving their crisis, Jesus first intensifies it. The disciples are now swept away with the magnitude of their problem –

Much like Moses when the crowd was getting hungry in the wilderness: *Where am I to get meat to give to all this people?... Shall flocks and herds be slaughtered for them, and be enough for them? Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, and be enough for them? (Num 11:13, 22)*

In your devotional reading this week you'll discover more parallels between the feeding of the 5,000 and the feeding of the Israelites under Moses' leadership. But the disciples are really confused by the command Jesus has given them. One of them gets out his calculator, does the math, then quips –

“Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?” (v 37b) Must have been a little sarcasm there. 200 denarii was the equivalent of a year's wages. They were saying, “Um, Jesus, let's get real! We obviously don't have these kinds of resources.”

And what do *we* sometimes say? “If only we had enough money, then we could really do something!” Rather than trusting God to supply what is needed to do His will, we focus on our lack of resources and get discouraged.

So in **v 38**, Jesus suggests that they change their focus. Instead, of dwelling on what you lack, He said, what *do* you possess? *“How many loaves do you have? Go and see.”* Apparently this problem is not going to be solved by something beyond them, but by something from among them.

This reminds me of a story I read about **Dr. Tony Campolo**, who was once asked to pray for a financial need to be met. He was speaking at a conference where they were raising money for a certain missions project, and they asked him to pray that God would meet this need. So Campolo stood up and, to the utter amazement of everyone present, graciously said “no.” He approached the microphone and said –

“You already have all the resources necessary to complete this mission project right here within this room. It would be inappropriate to ask for God's blessing, when in fact God has already blessed you with the abundance and the means to achieve this goal. The necessary gifts are in your hands. As soon as we take the offering and underwrite this mission project, we will thank God for freeing us to be the generous, responsible and accountable stewards that we're called to be as Christian disciples.” And they did.

I think of our own experience as a church family, and how the financial need seemed so overwhelming when we first began to think about buying land and building a permanent facility for our ministry. We were just trying to meet our annual operating budget – and none of us seemed to have a lot of disposable personal income to spare. So where would these additional funds come from?

I like the cartoon of the guy who's greeting the pastor after church and he says, “Pastor, I was really glad to hear you say you didn't know where the money for our building project was going to come from. because for a minute there, it looked like you thought it was going to come from us!”

Jesus says, “*You* give them something to eat. What *do* you have?” They came up with only five loaves and two fish. But when they gave it to Jesus, He blessed it, He broke it, they served it. And just like the manna in the wilderness, everyone had plenty to eat.

v 42 says *they all ate and were satisfied*. So He didn't just give them a little snack to hold them over. Their stomachs were full, and there were leftovers besides – *twelve baskets full (v 43)*, one for each disciple! The Lord Jesus provided so abundantly, there was a generous surplus. And what a thrill it must have been for the disciples, not just to watch, but to actually *participate* in this miracle.

Jesus had to do it, but they got to help! I suppose Jesus could have created all this food out of nothing, like He did the universe. He could have even satisfied everyone's stomach instantly, without using any food at all. But as one author suggests, *the feeding of the 5,000 is a cookie-baking story*. If you're baking cookies and you invite your kids or grandkids to help, it's not because you actually *need* their assistance; it's because you want to share in their delight as they get to help you and then eat the finished product.

So in this case, *Jesus could have done it all by Himself better. But He was anticipating that moment of unrivaled joy when grown men stood in a circle, thousands of full-stomach-folk behind them, each holding a basket brimming with fish and bread, silly grins on twelve bearded faces. I can hear them now... “Let's do it again!”*

They must have had a lot of fun that day! But the disciples realized this was a lesson in *God's* greatness and faithfulness, not theirs. And still today, our joy is in knowing that Jesus uses what we bring to Him, but the miracle is in *His* hands, not ours. We are not manufacturers; we are only distributors.

The reason we are worshiping in this place today is because of *God's* greatness and *God's* faithfulness, but He has used the sacrificial gifts of so many of you. I'm thankful that the Summit family has never grown discouraged by a \$2.8 million price tag. Instead, you keep hearing Jesus ask, “What *do* you have? Will you share it so that I might bless it and multiply it?”

And your generous response to this challenge has not only met the need here at Summit. God has taken your gifts and multiplied them so that they have also supplied a couple of orphanages for 230 precious children who were formerly destitute, living on the streets of India.

More recently, your gifts have overflowed so that the needy within our own neighborhoods are also being blessed. It reminds me of the construction of the tabernacle in the Old Testament –

When the people brought their offerings, *the material they had was sufficient to do all the work, and more* (**Exodus 36:7**) Who could have guessed that the Lord would do all of this for us – and more? Our needs are met, with leftovers to share! *God* did it, but we got to help! Hasn't it been great?

Let's do it again! You'll soon receive a more complete report on the impact of all your giving to *Seeking Things Above*, as we approach the end of year 2 in this particular giving campaign. On Sunday, November 29, we'll have an opportunity to bring our Thanksgiving Offerings and our final one-year commitment to *STA*. And guess what? 2010 could be the year we pay off the debt!

Our loan balance is now less than \$200,000, and if we continue to place whatever we have in the hands of Jesus, I fully believe that we can burn the mortgage one year from now, putting us in a position where we can seize future opportunities to expand Christ's kingdom locally, regionally, and globally. So let's make this a month of thankful prayer and obedience to Christ. "*How many loaves do you have? Go and see.*"

And at a personal level, let's remember, we have a faithful God who does provide for the needs of His people. You can trust Him in the crisis. *The Lord is (your) shepherd, (you) shall not want* (**Psalm 23:1**). *God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work* (**2 Corinthians 9:8**).

So don't sink into despair if you are facing an overwhelming challenge in your life. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus. Trust His power, His compassion, and His plan. When your faith is challenged by a crisis, the Lord Jesus Christ is always trustworthy. He blesses His people with sufficiency.

And 2nd, He blesses them with **SECURITY**. When you trust God in the crisis, you find that His provision is always sufficient for your need, and His protection makes you secure in any circumstance, even in the midst of a frightening storm.

45-52 – *Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. 46 And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray. 47 And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. 48 And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them, 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 And 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.*

This is now the second storm the disciples have survived since deciding to follow Jesus. The first time, remember Jesus was sleeping, but at least He was in their boat when the waves surged against them.

This time, they are separated from Jesus, so the challenge to their faith is even greater. And it's this second scene that actually illustrates the situation of God's people today.

Because the Christian life is like a voyage at sea with many storms awaiting us, and we too must face these storms without Jesus physically present in our boat. However, just like the situation in **Mark 6**, the Word of God assures us that Jesus is also watching over us, and praying for us from on high.

Now the surprising thing in both these incidents is that it's Jesus Himself who leads His followers directly into the storm. This time, in **v 45**, *He made His disciples get into the boat*. And there is a sense of urgency here, as apparently the miraculous meal has fueled the Messianic fervor of the crowd.

A revolutionary uprising is in the air. People are ready to make Jesus their king so they can overthrow Roman oppression! And the disciples may be thinking the same thing. They are reluctant to leave, like children having a good time don't want to get back in the car to go home.

So Jesus corrals them and insists that they get in the boat, and then He probably gives the boat a shove, so they would get out of there! Keep that in mind. Jesus forces them to go out to sea, with full knowledge of what was coming.

And as Jesus withdraws once again to a quiet place for prayer, He watches as the storm clouds appear, the winds pick up, and what should have been a quick trip across the lake for these experienced fishermen becomes a battle for their lives.

John tells us they were about 3½ miles off shore, and they had been strenuously rowing for 7 to 8 hours. They must have been worn out, frustrated, and frightened. And Jesus is watching all of this. But He waits until the situation is desperate.

Then *at about the fourth watch of the night*, sometime between 3 and 6 AM, Jesus comes to them, *walking on the sea*. And then Mark adds that intriguing statement: *He meant to pass by them*.

Have you ever wondered what that means? Why did Jesus intend to pass by them? “Hey guys, what’s happening? Just passing through here; gotta go now, see ya later!”

Well in your devotional reading this week, you can explore this further, but in the Old Testament, when God appeared to Moses, the text says that His glory *passed by* him. Likewise the Lord *passed by* Elijah on the mountain. In other words, this is the God of Israel appearing to these frightened disciples!

And besides, throughout the Old Testament, only God can take a stroll on the water! Scripture says, He walks in the recesses of the deep (**Job 38:16**). He makes a path through the great waters (**Ps 77:19**).

Job puts all this together when he says, *(God alone) tramples the waves of the sea... Behold, he passes by me, and I see him not; he moves on, but I do not perceive him. (9:8,11)*

So here is Jesus, walking where only God can walk. But unlike the mysterious revelation of God in the Old Testament, Jesus is actually making God visible to His disciples. The God of Israel, so majestic and awesome, but unknowable face to face, is now coming up close and personal in Jesus of Nazareth.

John was on that boat, and later he wrote, *No one has ever seen God; the only God (Jesus), who is at the Father's side, he has made him known (1:18)*. And yet, the disciples somehow miss the moment.

They didn't even recognize Jesus. They were terrified because they thought they were seeing a ghost. But this was no apparition, nor was it an extra-tricky trick-or-treater! This was God to their rescue.

So Jesus immediately calms their fears: “*Take heart,*” He says, *it is I. Do not be afraid” (v 50)*. Remember how God identified Himself to Moses at the burning bush as Yahweh, the great I Am? The Greek expression Jesus uses here is identical.

So Jesus not only walks in God's steps, He also takes God's name for Himself! Jesus *is* the great I Am. He is the Creator, the self-existent, eternally omnipotent God! He can do what no human can do or ever conceive of doing. He moves mountains, shakes the earth, arrays the heavens, and treads on the waves of the sea. With the Lord Jesus Christ, all things are possible and nothing is even difficult!

Can you see why knowing Him makes a difference in your security? Can you see why those who know Him can experience peace even when the winds of life are blowing hard against them? The waves that frightened the disciples turned out to only be stair steps, bringing the Lord Jesus to them.

So can you say with David, *The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?* (**Psalm 27:1**) With all the disciples have witnessed, we would think that they should have been able to say this in the storm.

But the dismal fact, according to **v 52**, is that they reflected very little on the significance of the spectacular miracle Jesus had performed just a few hours earlier. That seems hard for us to imagine. But before we get too smug about this, how easily do *we* forget the Lord's gracious dealings in our lives, and then act shocked and amazed when He intervenes for us once again?

Jesus' calming of the sea proves that He is always in control. His people are always secure. If the disciples had truly recognized Him as the promised Messiah, surely they might have realized that the Messiah would not call disciples to Himself, and then lose all of them in a boating accident because He wasn't paying attention!

Again, this is not to suggest that accidents cannot happen to followers of Jesus today. Of course they can. This is a fallen world, and Jesus' followers are not exempt from all the consequences of that fallenness.

The death of John the Baptist in last week's passage proves that even the best of God's servants sometimes die an untimely death. But believers of every age must learn in difficult and frightening circumstances to trust in God's wise providence, knowing that He sees, He cares, and He protects.

The prophet **Micah** spoke of the coming Messiah and said, *He shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. And he shall be their peace.* (**5:4-5**)

He is our peace! He is our security! Jesus said, "I know my sheep." "*I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand*" (**John 10:28**). Jesus Christ leads His flock, and when we are in trouble, He won't abandon us.

No wonder David can say, *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.* (**Psalm 23:4,6**)

So how about it? Will you trust God in your crisis? If so, two great blessings will be yours: Sufficiency and Security. He will provide for your needs, and He will protect you from harm.

But in every situation you face, there is an important choice you must make. You can either focus on the greatness and faithfulness of the Lord Jesus Christ, or you can focus on your scary situation or be nervous about the magnitude of your need.

But you cannot focus on two things at once. Try as you like, it is impossible. We can't make our eyes go two different directions. God calls us to focus on Him, and as we do, our crisis is seen in perspective. When you have a small God, you have great problems. But when you have a great God, you have small problems. So let's bow in prayer as we close this morning, fixing our eyes on Jesus...