

“The Feeding of the 5000” Mark 6:30-44

< Introduction >

When you see a Christian church building in Japan, you may see these words of Jesus on the sign. "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." This is from the gospel of Matthew 11:28.

When I was a seminary student, I attended a church conference. One of the men there shared this verse with me and I was greatly influenced by it. So I joined a church, became a Christian, and was baptized. However, I have discovered that volunteering in church can be hard work, and there is a lot to do. When I come home from the worship service, I'm exhausted and sometimes I don't feel like I've had a Sunday off. Maybe you have experienced something like this too. You are serving the church, serving the community, but your mind and body get tired on the very Sabbath that the Lord has given you. What should we do?

Today, I would like to read the words from Mark 6:30-44, the story known as the feeding of the five thousand. As I read this passage, I would like to ask how we should rest in the presence of God? I would like to hear it from the Word of God.

Mark 6:30-44

³⁰ 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. ³² And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. 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. 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. ³⁵ 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.

From these verses, I would like to talk about how we should rest in the presence of God. First of all, God invites us to be still and commune with Him. Second, Jesus has compassion on people as if they were sheep without a shepherd. Third, Jesus is the one who always fills us, and we should believe in Him.

To summarize today's sermon, we should respond to God's invitation to rest, rely on God's mercy, and trust in Jesus to fill us.

Mark 6:30-44 describes the event of the "feeding of the five thousand". This event is mentioned in all four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

First of all, God invites people to be still and commune with Him. Let us respond to that invitation. Before the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus had sent twelve disciples on a mission. In chapter 6 verse 7, the twelve disciples were paired together and Jesus gave them the authority to control unclean spirits, sent them to their respective cities to preach repentance, cast out many demons, and heal the sick. The 12 disciples then returned to Jesus. They reported back to Jesus what they had done, what they had taught, and what had happened to them. They had preached repentance, cast out demons, and healed many sick people.

With joy and excitement, they reported to Jesus every last detail of what they had done. Verse 31: Then Jesus said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while." Jesus was telling them to rest. By the way, the New Revised Version 2017 says "you alone", but if you look closely at the original language, it says "Come with Me". Jesus is commanding them to come with him and rest with him. Mark tells us that Jesus told them to rest because there were so many people coming and going that they did not even have time to eat. Jesus' disciples, with the authority given to them by Jesus, did their job well. But because of that, they did not even have time to eat. The disciples served a lot of people. But they were not able to provide for their own needs.

But why did Jesus tell his disciples, who had been working so hard, to rest with him? Because the disciples needed to commune with God. "A lonely place," Jesus said. This is reminiscent of what happened in the Old Testament when Moses and the others escaped from Egypt and met God in the wilderness and God led them. It reminds us of that event.

It could also be said that Jesus commanded His disciples to rest in order to teach them to rejoice in being His children, not in the fruits of their various works. In the tenth chapter of Luke's Gospel, when Jesus gave authority to the seventy-two people and sent them out, he saw that they were happy to report back to him. But then Jesus told them, "Do not rejoice that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." It is the Lord Jesus who gave the authority for this work. Therefore, it can be said that Jesus was trying to teach His disciples that they should not rejoice in the fruits of their own works, but that they should first rejoice in the fact that they were children of God. Jesus himself was also trying to commune with God the Father as he taught his disciples. When Jesus taught His disciples, He did so on a quiet mountain or in a small boat. There, Jesus faced his disciples and taught them the Word. Jesus himself woke up early in the morning, went to the mountains, prayed to God the Father, and listened to His voice. Jesus is God. He is omniscient and omnipotent. He is the one who does not need to rest. But Jesus rested so that He could humble Himself and listen and commune with his Father. We, too, in the midst of our work, need to rest our minds and bodies before God, be still, listen to His Word, and commune with Him.

There was a time in my own ministry when I was taught that I needed the fellowship of God. I was at a previous job. I was asked by a client to research the current situation of a country called Dominica for a TV travel program. I had a friend who was from Dominica at the time, so I asked him about it, and worked very hard to create a 15-page report. When I was finally done, I showed the report to my boss. A few minutes later, my boss yelled at me and warned me. I didn't understand what was going on, but when my boss pointed out my mistake, my face turned pale. I had submitted research on the Dominican Republic. However, the country the client was requesting was not the Dominican Republic, but a different country called the Commonwealth of Dominica. Although they share the same Caribbean Sea, they are completely different countries, with the Dominican Republic speaking Spanish and Dominica speaking English as its official language. I realized how stupid I was for making that mistake. I was so badly

warned that I became depressed. I was so depressed that I couldn't even handle my work after that. I wanted to do my job well, and I wanted to do a good job to get back at my boss. But things were going in a completely different direction. As I attended church and listened to the Word of God, I was reminded of the need to stop and rest before God, calmly look at my situation, and receive encouragement from God to move forward.

God is inviting us to be still before Him and commune with Him. We are sinners. There is only one perfect being, God. In our work, in our personal lives, we sometimes stray from the purpose that God has given us and forget what is important. It is essential that we encounter and fellowship with God. When we meet and fellowship with God, we can calm our minds, rest, receive His commandments, His comfort and encouragement, and turn our minds to Him and walk with Him. So, let's all respond to God's invitation to rest.

God invites us to be still before Him. And when we are still, God has compassion on us like a sheep without a shepherd. Let us rely on his mercy. Verse 32: "And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves." So they got into a boat by themselves and went to a lonely place.

Verse 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."

What a surprise! Many people saw that Jesus and his disciples were leaving in a boat, so they walked over and got there before them. Jesus had already become well known among the people. The disciples were also sent to different cities to preach, heal people's diseases, and cast out demons. So, the disciples were also well known among the people. Therefore, when people found them, they began to chase them, and the crowds attracted even more people, so that even before the boat arrived, people were waiting for Jesus and the disciples.

Verse 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."

The disciples, who had planned to rest, must have been disappointed. A large crowd was already waiting for them. There was no way they could rest in such a situation. But Jesus was different. When Jesus saw the crowds, he did not try to disperse them. Because they were like a flock of sheep without a shepherd, Jesus had deep compassion on them and began to teach them many things.

Jesus looked at the crowds and thought they were like "a flock of sheep without a shepherd." Sheep are very cautious and timid animals. They have difficulty living alone, and if they are separated from the flock, they get lonely, weaken quickly, and in the worst case, die. If a shepherd does not guide them, the flock itself may become confused, and if a wolf or other animal enters the flock, the flock may be scattered or, in the worst case, even wiped out. Jesus had deep compassion on the crowds that came without knowing anything about them, seeing them as "a flock of sheep without a shepherd."

Isaiah 53:6: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned--every one--to his own way." He compares human beings to weak sheep. We are created by God. But we are created beings, finite beings. And we are sinners, fallen into sin. Man, as a sinner, forgot the existence of the God who created him and went down the path he wanted to take. But what was there was misery and death. But Jesus brought those dying people back

to God, nurtured them, and tried to preserve their lives. That is the mercy that God pours out on people. And we all need this mercy from God.

I am a person in need of compassion. As I have shared with you several times, I have been harassed in the past by my boss at my previous company. There is nothing we can do to change that past. And even though it has been quite a while since then, there are times when I remember that. When I remember, I get caught up in anger and frustration. However, I realized that when I feel that anger, it turns my heart towards sin and self-pity and eats away at it. I realized that I was weak and needed God's mercy, because without God's mercy and forgiveness, I would be caught up in this anger again and it would consume me.

We are sinners. We all need this mercy from God. It is so easy for us to go astray and turn our backs on God. That is our weakness and the horror of sin. But when God sees us, He has compassion on us and nurtures us in His presence with a compassion that almost tears His insides apart. We all face many difficulties in our work and life. There are times when we feel weak and overwhelmed. But God is merciful and nurtures us. Let's run to the God who has mercy on us.

Jesus is the one who invites us to rest, pours out his mercy, and fills us up. Let us believe in Jesus, see verse 35. "And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, 'This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.'"

As Jesus was teaching the crowd, it was getting dark. The disciples suggested to Jesus that since it was getting dark, he should disperse this crowd and let them buy their own food. Jesus then makes a surprising suggestion to the disciples.

Verse 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?'"

Jesus had deep compassion for the crowds. So instead of telling his disciples to disperse the crowd, he told them to give them something to eat. For the disciples, what Jesus said was unrealistic. The place where the disciples and the crowd are is remote. It would take them hours to go and buy food and come back. And the crowd consisted of 5,000 men alone.

The Bible doesn't say, but if women and children were also present, there would have been over 5,000 people. The disciples are talking about two hundred denarii of bread. Two hundred denarii is about half of an adult man's annual income at that time. Gathering that much bread alone would have been a daunting task. And for 12 men alone to serve more than 5,000 people would be hard work. For example, when serving school lunches in Japan, at least 40 people are needed to serve more than 5,000 students. School lunches are a lot of work because it takes a lot of time in the morning to prepare the school lunches.

In other words, it would be very difficult for 12 people to feed over 5,000 people. The expressions on the faces of the disciples must have said, "It's impossible."

Look at verse 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.'"

Instead of answering the disciples' question, Jesus asked them how many loaves they

now had. All the disciples had were five loaves and two fish.

Let's look at verses 39-44. "Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. 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. And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men."

Jesus told his disciples to divide the crowd into groups and have them sit down on the green grass. After giving thanks to God, the Lord multiplied the five loaves and two fishes, and everyone in the crowd ate and was satisfied, and there was plenty left over. What a wonderful story!

This is a miracle that Jesus performed. Some people interpret this verse to mean that Jesus had enough food stored somewhere to feed 5,000 people, but that is not the case. It is nothing more than a miracle that Jesus performed for these disciples and the crowd. What is Jesus trying to tell us through this miracle?

This feeding of 5,000 people reminds me of an Old Testament event. It is in book of Exodus and the Psalms. In Exodus, the people led by Moses escaped from slavery in Egypt by the will of God. However, they had to go through the wilderness without food and water before they could reach the land that the Lord had promised them. It was at this time that God told the Israelites to "Behold, I send down bread from heaven for you." and gave them food called manna. God continued to provide for the Israelites for 40 years as they traveled in the wilderness. And in Psalm 23, God says, "The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, and accompanies me on the brink of death." The song goes on to say that in God, the Shepherd, there is no scarcity, and that He will make us lie down in green pastures and rest. In this time period, when people ate, they did not sit on chairs as we do today. They would lie on the ground, rest on one arm, and eat with their heads up. From today's point of view, it looks like bad manners. But Jesus who shepherded the crowds and the disciples, made them lie down, and fed them.

The disciples alone could not have fed this crowd of over 5,000. Impossible. But nothing is impossible with Jesus. Jesus had compassion on this crowd of over 5,000 people and provided for their needs and gave them rest. Jesus was showing them that God is the one who can meet all their needs.

There was a preacher named George Mueller who lived in the 19th century. He was born in Germany and preached the gospel in England. At the age of 25, he was sent to England by a missionary group to preach to the Jewish people living in England. He was convinced that he was sent to England to establish a children's home. Before he became a Christian, he was a young man who repeatedly committed delinquent acts. However, he was saved by God through prayer, and he was convinced that God had given him a purpose to build an orphanage through prayer. So he always maintained an attitude of doing things through prayer to God, knowing that God would surely provide for his needs. He used to ponder over the words of Psalm 34:8-11 during his prayers.

"Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him! Oh, fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack! The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing. Come, O children,

listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord."

On his journey of prayer to God, the children's tables were fed and their financial needs were met. He himself and the orphanage suffered from poverty and rampant epidemics. However, the orphanage, started by Mueller, was able to survive.

Through his prayers to God, five orphanages with a total of 10,000 children have grown up from there. For these children, 30 billion yen was given in today's Japanese yen. George Mueller is the one who proved that God can fulfill everything through prayer.

My brothers and sisters, nothing is impossible with God. God showed His disciples that He is the one who can meet all their needs by feeding a crowd of over 5000 people. We should be convinced that Jesus is the one who can meet all our needs, and we should depend on him. When we know that we can only be satisfied in Him and not in ourselves, we can ask Him for our needs with great assurance.

When we commune with God, we are given true rest. The One who provides for all our needs has given us everything. And because He had mercy on us and loved us, He gave His life on the cross to pay for our sins and give us forgiveness. When you confess Him as your Savior, the one who paid for your sins, you are invited into peace with God and rest with Him forever. Let us surrender our cares to the Lord. Let us confess to the Lord that we have been walking in our own way, repent, and receive forgiveness. Let us be confident that the Lord will fill us. Let us give our hearts to God and rest. Then God will be powerful and work among us.

Let us pray.

Gracious Father.

You are the one who fills us, has mercy on us, and gives us rest. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts. You fill us and there is no lack in us. We repent that we have tried to do things in our own strength without knowing You. We rely on You. You went to the cross, gave your life, and rose again to pay for our sins, and have won the victory over death that we fear. In You, there is no anxiety, no lack. Prepare us so that we can continue to walk, receiving rest from You. Thank you for giving and filling us with your generosity. We pray in the name of our beloved Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.