



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

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The Basket Case (Hope Restored Series)

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We have been walking through the Gospel of Mark – verse by verse. Let me give you a quick summary of what has happened so far. It's important to see and summarize the themes developing, pointing to what Jesus is like.

We hear Jesus say in Chapter One that “I want you to be fishers of people,” meaning He wanted His disciples, and eventually us, to contact and communicate with people the good news that God Himself, the Creator of the Universe has touched down on earth in the form of Jesus of Nazareth.

Then, just 23 verses later in the first chapter, Jesus heals a man with an evil spirit. Eight verses later Jesus heals the Apostle Peter's mother-in-law from a fever. One verse after that he heals plenty *kine* people—physically sick and demon-possessed people. Then just ten verses later Jesus heals a man of leprosy. That's just chapter one!

Then chapter two begins, and it starts with the healing of a paralytic who is lowered into a home through the roof. THE VERY NEXT VERSE after that we see that Jesus not only heals the physically sick but the spiritually sin-sick as well. He hangs out with the town's sinners, and He is criticized by the Pharisees for doing that. But here's how Jesus reacts to that:

Mark 2:17 On hearing this, Jesus said to them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.

That's good news. He comes to help and forgive and strengthen us sinners and reconcile us with God! That's the real healing.

And when the hyper religious people – like the Pharisees, criticize Jesus for picking grain on the Sabbath Jesus says

*Mark 2:27 “The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath.
Mark 2:28 So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”*

Jesus is on a roll. He is healing people from the burden of religiosity, and physical sickness and emotional and spiritual sickness, and this is just the first two chapters. In Chapter 3 He heals more people of diseases even on the Sabbath, which according to the Jewish religious law is illegal. He then teaches and trains His disciples how to heal and cast out demons.

Then in Chapter 4 Jesus teaches the people about spirituality using a parable of four soils, and then later while in a boat with His disciples, commands a storm to be quiet and still, and the wind dies down and all is calm. But the disciples are terrified.

*Mark 4:40 He said to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”
Mark 4:41 They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”*

Some 2,000 years later, we may think – wow this is so cool – Jesus can calm a

storm. He can heal people physically, emotionally. He can even forgive their sin. This is fantastic!

The disciples are just getting to know Him. But after the storm, they are terrified and they say almost in contemporary language, “Who is this guy?! We are getting scared and weirded out!” (I love how the Bible is transparent of even the weaknesses of the leaders of the faith.)

Then in Chapter 5, Jesus meets a man in the tombs who has not one or two demons, but 2,000 demons, and Jesus casts them all out of him into 2,000 pigs. (Special today: One demon per pig!) Jesus leaves that man he healed. He crosses the Sea of Galilee. He then heals a woman who had been bleeding for 12 years, and then later He brings back to life a dead young girl Jesus is on a roll!

And now we are in Chapter 6 today. Is it any surprise that now there are more than 5,000 people following Jesus? Actually, it says 5,000 men, which means 5,000 heads of households. Some scholars believe the crowd is actually 15 to 20-thousand people!

Why are there so many people? The word had gone out about this man Jesus who heals and teaches wisdom. Plus, I think it is because of the man who had 2,000 demons in the previous chapter who used to run around naked, lived in the tombs, cut himself with stones, and then got dramatically healed by Jesus and was now acting normal, so he went around and told everyone about Jesus.

That demoniac was exhibit A of a real changed life proving this Jesus guy is not a myth. Jesus is not crazy. He is not a liar. He can heal. He is the real deal!

Healing people and leading them to God are two of the really big things He does, and they should be the marks of anyone who follows Him. We should always be involved in praying for healing and leading people to God. The two big themes in the first half of Mark are healing and leading people to God.

So now, yes now, we are ready for this episode to unfold in the sixth chapter of Mark. Jesus has just sent the 12 disciples out. There is tension rising in the land. As you know from last week's message, King Herod beheaded John the Baptist. The disciples regroup with Jesus for one of the most extraordinary miracles that all of the gospels write about. So, let's hear the reading of the Scripture – again from the Bible Experience. Please stand.

Mark 6:30 The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to Him all they had done and taught.

Mark 6:31 Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, He said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."

Mark 6:32 So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.

Mark 6:33 But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.

Mark 6:34 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So He began teaching them many things.

Mark 6:35 By this time it was late in the day, so His disciples came to Him. "This is a remote place," they said, "and it's already very late.

Mark 6:36 Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat."

Mark 6:37 But He answered, "You give them something to eat." They said to Him, "That would take almost a year's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?"

Mark 6:38 "How many loaves do you have?" He asked. "Go and see." When they found out, they said, "Five—and two fish."

Mark 6:39 Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass.

Mark 6:40 So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties.

Mark 6:41 Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, He gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then He gave them to His disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all.

Mark 6:42 They all ate and were satisfied,

Mark 6:43 and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish.

Mark 6:44 The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.

So there are going to be three questions we are going to ask here:

Who gives them something to eat?

Will we share our Shepherd?

What is our basket?

1) Who gives them something to eat?

Mark 6:34 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So He began teaching them many things.

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I love this passage! Five-thousand people are in front of them. What is Jesus' first response? Compassion, says our text. Compassion. He didn't see them as just one large group that could fill the Blaisdell Arena. No, he saw them as individuals as hungry, hurting people. He had compassion on them.

And what is the disciples first response? "Yelp!" Not a cry for help with an exclamation point but as in "Yelp," like the app to help them find restaurants!

"Lord, these people are hungry so have them Yelp it and go to the neighboring villages and towns, or let's Yelp it and help them find a place for take-out. Maybe there's a Chinese restaurant around here. There's a Chinese restaurant everywhere. And with six orders, you get egg roll. Or maybe there is a Taco Bell at the base of the mountain."

And then Jesus gave His disciples the look as if to say, "I think it's you guys who are one taco short of a combination. You guys are not the brightest crayon in the box today. Right now, I love you, but I am not sure who else does."

No, Jesus didn't say all that. What He did say calmly, and a lot more lovingly than what I just surmised is: "You give them something to eat."

I wonder at that point if they were rolling on the ground laughing or maybe saying, "Jesus must have a heat stroke, man. Hey, Peter, James, John, did you bring your credit card? I didn't.

How much denarii do you have? We need 200. Jesus wants us to buy food for 5,000!! Is that crazy or what?!”

But Jesus said, “You give them something to eat,” which means there is no plan B. And they probably said, “Yeah right. Like there’s no McDonald’s here.” And Jesus said, “Let me show you how to make the original Filet-O-Fish. We are going to start with five loaves and two with a special spicy Holy Spirit sauce.”

Like the first communion Jesus takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it, distributes it. He passes the fish. And somehow miraculously, they serve enough fish and bread to serve all of the people there. And in the end, there were 12 baskets of broken pieces of bread and fish for leftovers!

Here’s the thing. The bread was broken into pieces so that people might be made more whole by having their physical hunger taken care of. Perhaps, it was a metaphor that Jesus was broken on the cross for us, pierced into pieces of flesh so that we might be made whole, but what He offers us is not the fulfillment of physical hunger but finally the satisfaction of our spiritual hunger. He is the bread we have longed for. Even doubters, maybe even atheists long for meaning that could come from God.

Jean-Paul Sartre, the famous atheist and existentialist, said this most intriguing sentence: “That God does not exist, I cannot deny. That my whole being cries out for God I cannot forget.”

Here’s the famous atheist, yes, an atheist, Jean-Paul Sartre who says God does not exist, but deep down inside his whole being cries out for a God and that longing lingers with him. He can’t forget this desire deep down inside.

2) Will we share our Shepherd?

These are people who are sheep without a shepherd, like in this feeding of the 5,000 plus. Are you willing to share your Shepherd, Jesus Christ, with others? Are

you willing to share with atheists, agnostics, secular humanists, doubters, and exiles this Shepherd who is willing to give His life for them, give them meaning, and a passion for life? Or are we going to keep this Jesus only to ourselves?

So, what is one of the best ways to point our friends to this Shepherd? I think we point them to our own pain, maybe to our own struggles, and then show them the miracle of what it means to know Jesus, who is with us in the deepest, darkest, times of our lives.

Jesus doesn’t give us easy answers. But the fact that He is always there is an amazing miracle itself. Sometimes we can think of miracles of physical healing as the end-all. They do happen but miracles come in many forms.

The miracle when we pray for healing comes in just the fact that a friend has come over to spend the time to pray, and show his or her love. Or a friend who cooks a meal and brings it over. That is part of the presence of God.

The rescue of the 12 soccer kids and their coach trapped in a cave in Thailand for 18 days is another miracle. Not physical but a miracle. They were not alone. Divers got to them finally after 9 days to bring them oxygen and food and blankets. A Thai Navy Seal diver died to help them. Miraculously kids all made it. There were lots of challenges before the rescue. But the miracles abound as thousands are praying, and hundreds are drilling, and draining water, trying to reach them.

When we are in trouble, not only is Jesus extending His hand to us, but there are probably thousands of angels fighting for us. They are fighting demons, fighting our doubts, helping to keep us positively looking at the Lord and not down at the ground downcast.

Prov. 17:22 A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones.

Whether someone is physically healed or not, one can still feel the tender touch of the Lord through His Holy Spirit and His people. We may lose a loved one, we may lose a job, we may lose a relationship, but there can still be wonderful miracles of God’s presence.

3) What is our basket?

What do I mean by that? Who really experienced the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000+? The ones who carried the baskets of food to the people! Why them? Because they could see the miracle of the food multiplying first hand over and over again as they distributed and then re-filled and then re-distributed again. The people way in the back of the crowd didn’t see it as much as the ones with the baskets.

Think of this: how would you have liked to be one of the people carrying a basket of bread or fish to the 15 to 20-thousand people there? They are the ones who really could see the miracle. They are the ones who are saying, “What? More bread? More fish? Where did this come from? What is Jesus doing? This is a miracle!”

This was such a big miracle that all four of the Gospels recorded it, one of the rare events included in all four of the Gospels. The disciples must have been amazed, and then maybe giggling at time with joy. “This is phenomenal. I am carrying more fish, and now more bread, and now more fish, and now more bread. Hey you all, look what Jesus is doing? It’s a miracle!”

So what are the baskets of miracle are you carrying to your friends and family to say – “Look, I have seen miracles! I have seen pointers, signs, and wonders that point to something you have always longed for in your heart. They point to a man named Jesus who is actually God. He is the one who can bring hope restored.”

Going back to what I said at the beginning of the sermon where I was recapping the first five chapters of Mark, what was the common theme? Miracles. People getting healed over and over again—lepers, the lame, demoniacs, woman sick with fever, a bleeding woman, a dead girl.

It's in the prayers and the seeing of miracles that should be part of the baskets we tell people. The ones carrying the baskets were the ones who should have been the most amazed and they would be saying, "Jesus filled the baskets; not me. It was Jesus."

If you have seen miracles, then tell others, and act in faith like you have seen miracles. And maybe you will see even more miracles if you ask God for miracles. We must always pray for miracles.

Recently Pam and I were in Tokyo. I was asked to preach to a Korean congregation and a Japanese congregation. What I didn't know was that because I had shared with the senior pastor of both congregations that I had seen miracles due to prayer, he promoted my coming as kind of a faith healer and encouraged people to come and be prayed for. I felt a little uncomfortable with that, but the die was cast. But nothing he said was untrue. I had seen people be healed after I or others prayed for them.

But I didn't have any magic. Nor was he saying I did, but it was unusual for me to preach at a church where people were expectant for they might get healed that day. But I think it is good to have a community expectant that God could move in a million miraculous ways today.

When I arrived, there was a mother and her young adult daughter who were waiting for me in the pastor's study. They wanted prayer for the daughter who had anxiety issues and depression. After the first service, there was a couple with their young son in a wheel chair who had a brain issue wanted prayer for healing.

After the second service there was a woman with a 9-year-old daughter who could not walk. The girl was upright leaning on her mom, and when I walked by she asked for healing prayer for her daughter as she leaned her child against my body so I had to catch her and hold her and pray for her.

I prayed for healing in the Japanese service as the people were seated. I also prayed for healing at the Korean service, where I was instructed to ask people to come forward for prayer, and about 50 came forward.

Now remember, I don't see myself as a faith healer. I have never been billed as a pastor who prays for healing and people get immediately healed. But I always pray for healing when people ask me to do so because always something good happens. They may not be fully cured, but people may perk up, or have hope restored or a burden lifted or they just feel the love or presence of God. If people suddenly feel the tender love of Jesus, that's a big win for me.

Do people ever have the depression lifted? Yes. Do they have hurting joints stop hurting? Yes. Are some healed of pain or a disease? Yes. Yet, not everyone is healed. We deal with a personal God who knows what is best for us in this life or the next.

So what happened two weeks ago on that Sunday? Did any of the people who met me in the pastor's office get healed? Not to my knowledge. But the boy in the wheel chair who couldn't speak but gibberish and would rock back and forth became very calm during the prayer and his parents said that was unusual.

What about the girl who was leaning on you who couldn't walk? I think she still cannot walk. I haven't heard otherwise. But did they all feel the love of God? Yes. Did they seem happier after the session of prayer? Yes. Calmer? Yes. Did I hear of any physical healings that day? Yes.

The pastor of that church reported a week later that people said they were healed of throat pain, motion sickness, hip joint pain, and kidney filtration troubles. But remember, I am not saying it is my spiritual gift, but I do believe if all of us whenever the opportunity arises pray often in faith for healing, we will see something good happen whether some feel the peace and presence of God or a physical healing.

For me, praying for people, praying for healing is like carrying a basket for Jesus. I have seen tremendous miracles in my life not due to my prayers but due to someone's prayers. I have seen miracles. I have been like a disciple seeing my basket fill with bread and fish, and then I get to tell others about it and distribute those stories and then their lives get changed.

We can all be basket carriers if we share the good news of miracles. I think sometimes just sharing the stories raises people's faith and allows more miracles to occur.

I once was in a hotel restaurant telling people that I do believe in miraculous prayer and telling them stories in my basket of how Jesus heals, and the guy I am having dinner with suddenly says, "Oh my goodness." He startles his wife and Pam and me. He said, "My hands, my hands. I have arthritis in my hands, I couldn't close them. but now I can. They're healed!"

We need to share our baskets of stories of Jesus and his miracles. Sometimes when I pray for people the healing might happen the next day and not right then. I don't know why.

At the services in Tokyo the pastor wrote me later that between 30 to 40 people got healed out of the 550 or so who were there. One woman said, "When I came up forward for prayer it was because my left leg hurt. She said, Pastor Dan prayed and nothing happened. [That's typical]."

She continued, "But then what did happen is that I have had a headache for ten years every day, and suddenly that headache disappeared and it never came back."

I call it my ricochet prayer. Pray for the knee and miss it, and it then touches the head and she gets healed. No, actually it means God knew what she needed for healing and so He healed the headache. One man typed on his phone and had a Google translation to tell me that his ailment was healed immediately.

Now let me tell you clearly. All I am doing today is carrying a basket of miracle stories to tell you that you might know Jesus more and have your faith enhanced. Second, I don't have any special healing gift. I believe all of us can and should pray for healing if we just have the faith of a mustard seed and maybe some helpful training, which we do offer. For people will get healed if we would just pray for them. We all need to be in the practice of praying for healing.

Third, something happened in the first service I preached at in Japan. It was during the Japanese service. At the end of my sermon, I felt moved to ask if anyone wanted to become a Christian to raise one's hand and I would lead them in a prayer. One woman did. I thought later how nice was that!

It wasn't until I returned to the United States that one of our staff said, "Dan, that was the biggest miracle that day, not the physical stuff." He said I have missionary friends in Japan who have served there for years before seeing one conversion. It is a hard country for Christianity as only .2 percent of the population is Christian. So, he said, the real miracle was a young adult woman who had decided to give her life to Christ.

The whole point of sharing our baskets of faith and miracles is to bring someone closer not to you but to Jesus so that they may one day fully trust Him. So when people don't get physically healed, that's

not the whole story. Did they feel a burden lifted due to a prayer to Jesus or a sense of His presence? Those are all still the signs and wonders of a great God who responds to our prayers.

The challenge to us all today is will we be willing to share our baskets of what we have seen and heard about how great God is. Even if you have had a hard time, a difficult circumstance, is there a lot of blessings you can share with others even if things were hard and losses were great. Even in the darkest time, I bet we can see Jesus coming along side of us.

In the last month I have lost several good friends and about to lose more. But even in their sickness and in their death, I saw God's miracles. I saw friends come forward and provide love and support. I saw family members pull together and show love. I saw prayers of God's presence on the sick, and saw them answered.

And I know for all of them, even though they died, that this is not our home and they are with the Lord, and the Lord will be with us in our deep, deep loss and grief. He will be there for us.

If you think of your darkest time, were there some things, some people, some angels who came forward and showed God's presence and miraculous hand?

As we listen to this song, may we prayerfully think of what God has done for us. And may we be basket holders sharing those stories or miracles and blessings with others that they may know the Shepherd we know. And may we realize that is how we give them something to eat.

As the worship team gets into place, let me lead us in prayer.

Lord, so much of Jesus life was seeing the pain of us humans. And so He would pray and heal. And He always wanted his disciples to pray for healing for others. But you know Lord, and we know that

not all are healed immediately. But the truth is this: even in our great losses, even in the darkness...you are there still blessings us and sustaining us. In Christ's name, Amen.

"BLESSINGS"

*We pray for blessings, we pray for peace
Comfort for family, protection while we sleep
We pray for healing, for prosperity
We pray for Your mighty hand to ease our suffering
And all the while, You hear each spoken need
Yet love us way too much to give us lesser things*

*'Cause what if your blessings come through rain drops
What if Your healing comes through tears
What if a thousand sleepless nights are what it takes to know You're near
What if trials of this life are Your mercies in disguise*

*We pray for wisdom, Your voice to hear
We cry in anger when we cannot feel You near
We doubt your goodness, we doubt your love
As if every promise from Your word is not enough
And all the while, You hear each desperate plea
And long that we'd have faith to believe*

*'Cause what if your blessings come through rain drops
What if Your healing comes through tears
What if a thousand sleepless nights are what it takes to know You're near
What if trials of this life are Your mercies in disguise*

*When friends betray us
When darkness seems to win
We know that pain reminds this heart
That this is not,
This is not our home
It's not our home*

*'Cause what if your blessings come through rain drops
What if Your healing comes through tears
What if a thousand sleepless nights are what it takes to know You're near*

*What if my greatest disappointments or the aching of this life
Is the revealing of a greater thirst this world can't satisfy
What if trials of this life
The rain, the storms, the hardest nights
Are your mercies in disguise*

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