

Mark 6:32-44 “The Impossible Is Possible”

Near the end of my tenure as an Associate Regional Minister in Virginia, I was assigned to provide staff oversight to the New Church Development committee. Lee Parker, our Regional Minister, believed everyone on staff should be able to do each other’s job, and so we cross trained. We each had our primary assignments — mine were men’s ministry, youth ministry, and outdoor ministry — but every couple of years Lee would switch things up. One day he said, “Jesse, I want you to work with new church development. We’ve got three new congregations starting, and I want you to make sure they have access to every resource available.” I said, “Okay... but I don’t know *anything* about starting a new church.” He said, “I trust you’ll learn what you need to know.” And then he added what he always said when he shuffled assignments: “It will be fun.” Thanks.

But the more I thought about it, the more I started convincing myself—yeah... this *could* be fun. Most ministers entertain a quiet fantasy about starting a new church. That’s especially true for those of us in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Our movement started with the sense that somewhere along the way—especially after Emperor Constantine linked Christianity with the Roman Empire in the fourth century—the church had gathered a lot of institutional baggage that Jesus never intended. Our founders believed we could sweep all that aside and recover the simple, vibrant faith of the earliest followers of Jesus. Church historians even gave us a name – we are part of the Restoration Movement. Our identity traces back to the Cane Ridge Revival in 1801 near Lexington, Kentucky—a gathering so electrifying that participants compared it to the church’s birth at Pentecost.

But even in our relatively short life as a denomination, we’ve managed to collect some institutional baggage of our own. So the idea of starting fresh is appealing to church planters. Imagine starting fresh again—leading Bible studies in living rooms, watching the community grow as people discover the gospel in a setting that feels simple and authentic.

You picture the energy building, the circle widening, the day when you have to find bigger and bigger places to meet because the message keeps catching on.

That's how Cynthia Hale started Ray of Hope Christian Church in Atlanta, Georgia which eventually became the largest Disciples congregation with over 5,000 members. But she'll be the first to tell you that the dream is easier to imagine than it is to build. Most of our excitement comes from picturing the finished product, but we forget how much work and how many resources it takes to get there. Where do you find the money? How do you communicate who you are? How do you file for 501(c)(3) status? Who understands the legal red tape? How do you hire staff you can't yet afford? The vision is exciting—but the path toward it can feel draining, even impossible.

I wonder if that's how Jesus' disciples felt. Their dreams of being a part of Jesus' ministry were starting to become a reality. They knew they were taking part in something big. They believed that Jesus was the Messiah -- the one who would make all things new. But they were also realizing that all this "new" was a *lot*.

Our scripture this morning is from Mark's gospel. Even though Mark is my favorite gospel, it is exhausting to read. The word "immediately" is used more in Mark than any of the other gospels. Jesus and the disciples were literally being chased all over Galilee by crowds of people who wanted to hear Jesus teach. We sometimes forget that Jesus was not just a low-key itinerant preacher who went around the Judean countryside eating dinner with Pharisees and crashing wedding parties. He was a sought-after celebrity. He was popular with all the right people and unpopular with all the right people.

On the day this story took place, Jesus and his disciples were trying to find a place to take a break from the whirlwind of activity they were in. Back in verse 31, the author wrote, "Jesus 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.” So they got in a boat and headed toward what they thought would be a place where they could catch a break and rest. But when they got there, a huge crowd had already gathered. Jesus *could* have said, “Come on people, boundaries! We need a break here. Let us take a day off.” But instead, he had compassion for them. He compared the crowd to lost sheep. Of course he would be there for them. So he started teaching, and as the day was winding down, one of the disciples came to Jesus and said, “It’s late, and these people are getting hungry. We’re out in the middle of nowhere and you need to send them on their way so they can grab something to eat from one of the surrounding villages.” Jesus said, “Okay, feed them.” The disciples said, “Feed them? With *what*?! We need money to go to one of these villages to bring in bread!” Jesus said, “Go find out how many loaves of bread you can find here among the people.” The disciples came back and said, “Five loaves. Oh, and two fishes.” So Jesus said, “Go divide them up and sit them in groups of 50s and 100s.” Then he blessed the bread and fish, and “all ate and were filled; and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.” And that was that.

Here’s the beauty of this story -- The disciples were worried about the *problem*. “We don’t have enough. We can’t do this.” They soon discovered that God doesn’t start out with a problem. We humans start out with “what do we *not* have.” God starts out with *what we already have*.

Here are a few questions to carry with you this week: Put yourself in the disciples’ shoes for a moment. How would you feel if Jesus casually told you to do something that was basically impossible? In verse 36 the disciples offer what seems like a perfectly reasonable solution: send the crowds into town so they can buy something to eat. Honestly, it’s a good plan. It’s practical. It makes sense. A lot of us probably would have suggested the same thing. But Jesus has a different idea—and it sounds much harder than theirs. Can you relate to the disciples in this moment? Have you ever had a time when the sensible, well-thought-out path was

right in front of you, but you felt God nudging you toward something bigger... something less predictable... maybe even something that felt impossible?

It's interesting that just one chapter earlier Jesus sent the disciples out in pairs and told them to take "no bread, no bag, no money in their belts" (Mark 6:8). They were to depend only on what other people could provide along the way. Maybe Jesus was teaching them something important—that following him isn't just about giving to others. Sometimes it's about learning how to receive from others too. So when the disciples suggest sending the crowd away to feed themselves, maybe they're still stuck in that old mindset that everyone needs to fend for themselves. And honestly, that sounds pretty familiar, doesn't it? We live in a culture that *really* values independence. We're taught to take care of ourselves and not rely too much on anyone else. So if the disciples struggled with this idea, it's probably no surprise that we do too.

Here's this week's takeaway – When you're staring at a situation that feels too big—a strained relationship, a project that doesn't have enough resources, a difficult diagnosis, or just the weight of the world—try asking a different question. Instead of asking, "What *don't* we have?" try asking, "*What five loaves and two fish are already here?*" Maybe what you have is time. Maybe it's a phone call. Maybe it's a listening ear, a little courage, or a small act of generosity. The miracle doesn't start with abundance. It starts with offering. Sometimes the impossible becomes possible not because we suddenly have more, but because we finally place what we already have in Jesus' hands.