

The lectionary compilers did something very strange with the Gospel selection this morning. They chopped out seventeen verses and in doing so, cut the meat away and left the scraps, or did they? What they removed is a story about a miraculous feeding; five thousand people dined on five loaves of bread and two fish. Jesus fed a huge crowd on next to nothing. The story was a favorite of the early church. The magical element of the story impressed them with Jesus' divine power, but more importantly, the story suggested the abundance of grace through Jesus Christ. There was enough, through the mercy and love that Jesus Christ brought to those who turned to him, to meet the needs of all. God's grace never runs out. Some scholars look at this feeding miracle and others like it, and there are several in the gospels, and see Eucharistic overtones. Through the Eucharist, a chief sacrament of the church, we are fed with the spiritual body and blood of the Savior, a tangible means of experiencing the grace of the Cross. So the story that we don't have today, the story the lectionary compilers left out, is an important one, and I, for one, cannot proclaim this portion of Mark's gospel without mentioning it to you.

But look what happens when we do leave it out. Through a bit of cutting and pasting, easy to do with a word processor today, we take blinders away from eyes that seldom see an equally important point, one crucial not only to our physical well-being, but our spiritual. Jesus took a break from a busy schedule, and compelled his closest friends, his immediate circle of disciples to take a break, too. Why? Because they were exhausted. We hear this in the gospel, but we do not comprehend. Our busy minds fly over it and latch on to the feeding miracle. But the point is the importance of rest – rest to recharge our spiritual batteries, rest to energize our bodies, because there is much to do in this world in the name of Jesus Christ, and if we are true to our discipleship, we will stay busy with this work until we go to our graves. From time to time, we need to slow down. Look carefully at the story and we see something else, and get a real sense of the pressure on Jesus and his disciples. Even though the Lord knew that he and his disciples needed a break, and planned a short retreat, it just didn't work out the way he wanted, because the crowds anticipated where he was going and beat him there, and he saw their needs and had mercy on them. He began to teach them many things, and in the late evening, when their spiritual hunger had been satisfied he fed them to satisfy their physical needs, too. And then Jesus and the disciples set out across the lake, probably hoping for a break again, but as soon as they made shore, they were right back at it, healing and teaching and bringing the love of God to broken world, starved for the grace of God manifest in Jesus our Lord.

What is the he point for us? As Christians, there is plenty of work for us if we truly want to labor in God's vineyard. We will grow weary and we really need to stop and rest from time to

time. But, even in our weariness, God in Christ is with us, and through the Holy Spirit we will continue to find the strength and power to do the work that our Lord gives us to do. *Amen.*