

Have We Learned The Lesson of the Loaves?

Mark: 6: 45-52

The late J. B. Phillips, New Testament scholar, in his translation of verse 52 of our text translates it this way;

He says, “for they had not the sense to learn the lesson of the loaves”. Hence the question that I want us consider as we look at this particular passage and scripture today - Have we learned the lesson of the loaves?

Some years ago, the late Jamison Jones wrote a book entitled “The Magnificent Future” and in that book he tells a story. It tells of Alvin Linguine, who taught for many years at Garrett Evangelical Theological seminary in Evanston, Illinois.

It said, one day that Alvin and his son were out fishing and it was one of those days when the fish were not biting and so Alvin and his little son became engaged in some extended conversation. So out of the blue Alvin’s son turned to him and said, Dad what do you think is the hardest thing God ever had to do? And being the wise teacher that he was he said, well son obviously you have done a lot of thinking about that, what do you think? The son said, well when I was taking science in school, I thought the creation was the hardest thing God ever had to do. But later on, after reading in the bible about the miracles, I thought maybe the resurrection was the hardest thing God ever had to do. But Dad the longer I read about the disciples I have come to the conclusion that the hardest thing God ever had to do was to teach the disciples who Jesus is and what Jesus was really about. Alvin said to his son I think you were are right and Mark agrees. When Mark tells story of the feeding of the five thousand Mark does not want you to get so caught up in the loaves that we lose sight of the lesson. He does not want us to get so caught up in the meal that we lose sight of the message. He does not want us to get caught up in the resources that we lose sight of

the source. This is really a story about discipleship. Here Jesus is seeking to teach the disciples and us something about who He is and what He is really about. He wants them to understand that to follow him is no cakewalk and they would be led into situations where they would come face to face with major crisis and the serious evils of the world. I have a friend who says if we have not met the devil face to face we may be traveling in the same direction.

Jesus wanted them to learn that lesson because he knew that if they did not learn that lesson they would not hang in there and would soon give up and fade away. He wanted them to know that by the grace of God through HIM, there is the power to overcome every difficult, demanding situation imaginable. Jesus was so intent on upon the disciples learning that lesson that he engaged them in what I call some participatory education.

There is a Brazilian scholar by the name of Paulo Freire, who wrote a book entitled, "The Pedagogy of the Oppressed". In that book he talks about a banking concept of education it's an oppressive form of education in which the teacher has all of the information. It the responsibility of the teacher to pour information into the students mind which acts as a receptacle and it is the responsibility of the student to feed that information back to the teacher exactly as it was given without doing any kind of thinking on his or her own. Freire said that that kind of teaching is an oppressive form of education. But Jesus did not believe in that concept. He sought to lead the disciples to discover of truth for themselves. Jesus knows that not very much can happen through us unless it first of all happens to us.

So Jesus is trying to give the disciples a taste of his of his love, a taste of his power and look how he involves them. He says to them you give them something to eat. They asked him, are we to go and buy 200 denarii worth of bread give it to them to eat? He said to them how many loaves have you? In other words take an inventory of your own

talents your own resources your own abilities, your own gifts. When they had found five loaves and two small fish, he then ordered them to get the people to sit down in groups in the green grass He then took the five loaves and two fish, blessed and broke them gave them to his disciples to set before the people. After everyone had eaten the disciples presumably were the ones who picked up the leftovers. Now surely you would think that if anybody had learned the lesson of the loaves after that kind of participation it would have been the disciples. But you know my sisters and brothers after every lesson exam time comes. Don't miss this, a faith that has not been tested is a faith that cannot be trusted, Jesus knows that and that is why these two stories go together. We're told in verse 45 that immediately he had the disciples get into a boat and told them to go across the sea while he remained behind. Now you would think that surely anything else that would befall them would be no big deal for them after all, they had not just seen but participated in the miracle of miracles. But Jesus remained behind now I'll give you a tip – it's a set up. He stayed behind and I imagine he was praying, oh God I hope they learned the lesson because they are going to need it. And sure enough as soon as they got out on the sea, the text says a great storm arose. Now watch this, the circumstances of the storm were just as much against them as the circumstances were against them when they were faced with the challenge of feeding the 5,000. But surely you would think that after what they just experienced, they could handle it. Surely, you would think that one of them would have enough faith and lead the group and sing something like, "O God, Our Help in ages, past our hope for years to come, our shelter from the stormy blast and our eternal home". Surely, you would think that one of them would have enough faith to lead the group in singing something like, "My hope is built on nothing less, than Jesus and His righteousness." Surely, you would think that one of them would have the faith to lead the group and start humming, "What a friend we have in Jesus". Surely, you would think that one of them would have the faith to lead the group in singing, "When the

storms in life are raging stand by me". Surely, somebody in the boat was thinking, "Through many dangers, toils and snares we have already come, tis grace that brought us safe thus far and that same grace will lead us home". Surely, somebody remembered from their childhood," Kum Ba Yah My Lord". Surely, you would think that someone would lead the group in singing," We shall overcome".

But Mark says, they had not the sense to learn the lesson of the loaves. You know my sisters and brothers I often wondered why they/we so often fail to learn the lesson of the loaves? Why? Well do you think that maybe one of the reasons why they/we fail to learn the lesson of the loaves is that sometime we think we're the ones supposed to be the closest to Jesus and we're exempt from the storms? Because we come to church every Sunday, because we tithe, because we serve the Lord and participate in ministry, therefore we should be exempt from the storms and we don't pay close attention as we should when the lesson is being taught. My bible tells me that in this world you will have trials, but thank God it went on to say, be of good cheer for I have overcome the world, but he did not promise that trouble would not come in our lives. Do you think that maybe one of the reasons they/we fail to learn the lesson of the loaves is that sometimes we're so self righteous when we get a little knowledge, we think we know it all. Therefore, we're not open to the learning that comes. Or do you think that they/we fail to learn the lesson of the loaves because these disciples lost their sense of community their sense of koinonia, the sense of responsibility that we have for one another. In the faith community we are held accountable for the growth of each other. Now I've learned the hard way that no matter how hard I try, I cannot see all of myself by myself. I need somebody to get a perspective on me that I can't see myself and it's good to have it within the life of the church where you have some friendly, loving critics. Please deliver me from unloving critics but Lord give me some more loving critics who will call me to the side and whisper in my ear,"you need to check yourself. I'm

your fellow disciple.” Or do you think that maybe the reason why they/we fail to learn the lesson of the loaves is that the disciples were more interested in credentials than Christ. More interested in titles than testimonies . Or maybe the bottom line is that they/we fail to learn the lesson of the loaves is that they/we fail to grow through what we are are going through. Don't get me wrong I don't' hold God responsible for everything that happens. I don't hold God responsible for all the Katrina's ,the storms and the other catastrophies that befall us. I don't hold God responsible for all the injustices and all the illness and crises of the world but I do believe that in the midst of everything that happens God can teach us all a lesson. A lesson that would help us grow closer to Him and closer to one another. I met someone who was in hurricane Ike that hit Houston and she told me that it tore the roof off of her house. She decided to stick it out and the next day she went out to see what happened and for the first time she met her next door neighbor. It took a storm to bring them together and they shared with one another all down the street. They became a community in the midst of the storm. Are we all growing through what we are going through? I believe God has four answers to prayer, yes, no, wait and the fourth one is grow. You're not ready for the answer, you need to grow some more, I wanna bless you but you gotta grow. Listen my sisters and brothers, I have learned the hard way that if we don't grow through what we are going through the holy spirit will check our transcripts and send us back to repeat the course. The only way the Holy Spirit knows that we have learned the lesson is that our behavior changes. In the meantime school is still in session.

I ask our World, our country, our city and state, FCC are we growing through this recession, high unemployment, people being laid off, losing homes, foreclosures. Yes I know it's happening but God has not deserted us. Maybe this is a time to get our priorities together. I bet God wants to see us get closer together to help us understand the sense of community.

The bottom line is the disciples flunked the exam. That's the bad news. But I come to preach the good news. You know what the good news is - the good news is that Jesus did not give them an F. They flunked the exam so badly that when Jesus did come to them walking on water they thought he was a ghost. But he did not give them an F, he gave them what he gives us all. He gave them an incomplete. Hallelujah, that's the good news. He's not finished with us even when we fail the test and don't learn the lesson. He got up from praying and He walked back to where they were, got in the boat with them and the wind ceased ... Ohh, the power of a love that just keeps on coming back. I know it's true for myself. I would dare to say that some of us would not be here today if it was not for the love of someone who kept on coming back. Some mother, some father, some teacher, some aunt, some brother, some sister, some preacher, some church member who loved us so much and would not let us go and comes back continually with an awesome, radical love and held on to us somehow. Today, we celebrate that kind of never ending love through the sacrament of communion.

Our United Methodist Bishop, Willis J. King, who graduated from Wiley college in Texas, tells the story of being the first one in all his family to earn a college degree. He was so proud that when he returned home one of the first things he wanted to do was to go buy himself a car. His father offered to go help him but Willis said, "Dad, I don't need your help, I have my degree". So, he went to the bank the next morning degree in hand. He spoke to the receptionist, who summoned the bank president. When the bank president arrived, Willis told him he needed to borrow \$500 to buy a car. The bank president asked him what he had for collateral that was worth at least \$500. He said, I have my degree. The bank president told him, that will not get you \$500 in this bank. Willis was so dejected that he turned to leave the bank. Suddenly, he heard a familiar voice, "Excuse me Sir, Excuse me Maam". It was his father pushing through the line. "Dad, what are you doing here? His

Dad replied, “ I came to cosign for you”. Willis said, “Dad, you can’t cosign for me. You can’t read or write. All you can do is make a ‘X’.” The bank president overheard him and said, Son, that may be true, but that ‘X’ is a good ‘X’. That X got you into college. That X kept you in college and that X got you out of college and that degree. If you get \$500 from this bank, it will be that X that will get it for you. Bishop King said as I think about my father’s wrinkled, slow hand signing that X, I could not help but think about Jesus, who did not just cosign for us, but paid it all, with a love that just keeps coming back forgiving, caring, loving us again, again and again. Now that’s Good News!!! “When nothing else can help“ Love Lifted Me”.

If I ever get a graduate degree in discipleship, I won’t graduate summa cum laude, magna cum laude or cum laude. It will be “thank you Lordy”.

As we go back to school and kickoff our Fall programs, we have the opportunity to grow and learn the lesson. The Good News is that it’s an open book test:

Is: 40 Them that wait on the Lord....

Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning

All things work together for good for those who love the Lord and are called according to his purpose

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me

John 3:16 God so loved the world..... That’s the lesson of the loaves

Let us pray.....

