

July 29, 2018, Mark 6:30-44  
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### **Loaves and Fishes**

I have a question to ask. How many of you have younger siblings? Have you noticed that when growing up with younger siblings that parenting rules seem to change with kids who came later on in the family line up?

I have many friends with younger siblings and consistently their biggest complaint is that for some reason these kids got away with behaving terribly, with absolutely no consequences. There is a lot of talk about the parental double standard. Childhood actions that would have resulted in instantaneous death or at least being grounded for life for older children, didn't even get a blip on the parental radar screen.

Being a youngest child myself, I will admit that I did get away with a lot of stuff, not because I was cute, although I was, but mostly because by the time I showed up, my three older siblings had water boarded my parents to the point that they were too tired to put up resistance. Being a smart kid, I capitalized on their weaknesses and took advantage of the situation whenever I could.

Apparently, my parent's failure to punish me affected my siblings deeply. To this day my sister still bitterly complains that I got away with everything, and she continues to be angry about that. I tell her, "For God sakes, you are 77 years old get over it!" She said, "I can't get over it, you got away with murder!!" Well, I didn't actually murder anyone, but I did get away with a quite a bit.

"Getting away with murder". It is a figure of speech sometimes used in casual conversation to describe outrageous behavior. But in our scripture today, we have front row seats to someone who literally got away with murder - King David.

The story tells us that he violates Bathsheba and impregnates her. Then to cover up this deed he murders her husband Uriah the Hittite; and the consequences of this atrocious sin, is that his illegitimate infant child conceived with Bathsheba will die at God's command.

But despite his horrific sins, born out of his taking advantage of Bathsheba, David is remembered as "The Good King David", "The Shepherd King", David, the beautiful, gentle, lyre playing boy king, beloved of God. However, Bathsheba, is another story. At David's hands she suffered a character assassination that persists to this day. She has been represented through time as the vile adulteress who sinned against her husband Uriah.

In art, she has been portrayed as the seductive temptress of David, and in the modern day she is sung about in Leonard Cohen's iconic song Halleluiah. Cohen describes Bathsheba, not as a victim of David's indulgence, but as a powerful woman, fully in control of David, manipulating him with her beauty and breaking him down to ruination. But those aren't the facts!

David has taken terrible advantage of his power as king, spying on Bathsheba, and then sending guards to bring her to him. And she must go to him because he is the king. Good King David defiles her and her marriage and her reputation all simply because he could. He was, after all the King.

Now taking advantage of a situation because we see an opportunity, or because we can, need not be confined to biblical stories. We all do it one time or another. Perhaps not to the extent that David did, but who here hasn't benefitted from someone else's weakness or ignorance now and again?

In sports it happens all the time. Competitors play aggressively to the vulnerabilities of their opponent in order to win; in business the greatest deals are born when one party is financially vulnerable, and in the day-to-day, using our authority and position to a particular end happens frequently. I, myself will confess to getting certain perks and advantages from wearing a clerical collar. I am less likely to be given a traffic ticket, most likely to be offered a seat on the subway, and often in conversation, I am deferred to as the final authority in all topics, even in areas that I have absolutely no knowledge. Who knew a 15-cent piece of plastic around my neck could make me so brilliant?

And here's another area of exploitation you yourselves may have experienced - kindness. People who tend to be kind are often subject to a high level of manipulation. There's an Arabic saying that states, "If your friend is made of sugar don't eat him up." Which generally translates to we shouldn't take advantage of someone who is generous of spirit or not likely to resist us. But it happens every day.

Now you may be thinking, what's the harm in getting over on someone or something now and again? What's wrong with getting away with something if you can? Here's the harm.

When we normalize the importance of our own needs over the needs of others, when we see it as a strength and a positive character trait to be able to take advantage of an opportunity to achieve a self-serving end no matter who may be harmed, then we run the risk of losing touch with our own humanity. If we objectify others as "the other", when we see ourselves as singularly most important and beyond the responsibility of civility and respect that is critical for living in community, then we are on a trajectory of not only "Me First", but of "ME Only".

And “Me Only” can move us further and further away from being a loving people of God. “Me Only” people are often fear based and they use fear as a means to control and manipulate behaviors and outcomes.

For example, we have been told that securing our borders will protect us from terrible crimes. That certainly feeds into our fears of the unknown. We have also been led to believe that keeping certain immigrants out will protect our assets of healthcare meant for American citizens only, and also, that impenetrable borders will save countless jobs for American citizens.

I don’t know about you, but I haven’t seen a lot of white Americans working as migrant sharecroppers or even mowing the church lawn. I believe that our fears have been pandered to and taken advantage of in order to achieve that “me first mentality”. And not only have our fears been exploited, I believe that other weaknesses of our human nature are being taken advantage of as well. Our tendency to stand silent in the presence of injustice unless we are personally affected. We have short-term attention to critical social issues after two to three weeks of news sound bites, and also have a proclivity for complacency when totally overwhelmed by situations that seem beyond our control.

If that seems harsh to you, so be it! Let’s talk about this past week. Despite a court order, 700 children who were taken away from their parents at the United States border have not as yet been reunited with their parents. The reason for this is that in the majority of these cases, the parent was deported or left the country without their child. The ACLU who brought the case against the government to cease these separations, reported that many of those parents had been manipulated into signing away their parental rights. They had been threatened that failure to sign would prevent them from ever seeing their children again. The ACLU lawyers reported that by taking advantage of their fear and ignorance, those parents relinquished their rights to their children forever.

And what are the consequences for our government’s failure to comply to the court mandate of reunification? I don’t know. Who goes to jail for that? Who gets fined, who has to stay home under house arrest? Who suffers for this?

For now, it is uncertain what may happen to the 700 children who cannot be reunified with their families. Many remain in the custody of HHS and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). It has been postulated by those monitoring these children that there's a high probability that many will never be reunified with their parents while under US care. How can we live with that and still call ourselves good Christians? Clearly, it will take a miracle to undo this horrific travesty.

In our Gospel this morning Jesus performs two miracles. The loaves and the fishes and then of course walking on water. These two miracles are important to us today because it shows us that we are not divine like Jesus and we cannot walk on water.

However, in our daily lives we can do miraculous things when we think beyond our own needs and see the needs of the greater world as important and what God intends of us.

The miracle of the feeding of the 5000 demonstrates that we can do amazing things once we commit to seeing those around us as worthy of our care; and that our neighbors in need are not for taking advantage of but are entrusted to us by God.

Jesus is teaching those disciples that the power of God is not in a parlor trick of making bread out of nothing, but it is in the sharing and caring for all of God's people. Jesus is teaching that it is not okay to say well, 'I've got mine, fend for yourself'. That's not the Christian I want to be. I don't want to be a part of a community that can get away with awful things simply because we can or because our fears are used against us to manipulate us into inaction.

As the disciples asked Jesus, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" The answer for the disciples is the same as it is for us. We can be the miracle of the loaves and fishes in this world, if we accept that this is not our table to control, but God's table, God's kingdom where all are welcome as God's children.

My brothers and sisters,

It is never too late to take advantage of what is good within us and to do justice.

It is never too late to once again become a righteous people of God.

I hope and pray that as a nation we find the courage to do so.

Amen.