

Drawing Closer To God.

Mark 6: 30 - 51 the Tension between Being and Doing.

Their doing
Their need to get away
The crowds find them
More doing
Their need to get away again
Circumstances create more work
Jesus appears to them in those circumstances
Their growth in understanding
Back to doing again

The realities of this battle in my life this last week and the temptation on waking up each morning.

This generates a lot of guilt for me. I know the value of getting away to be alone with the Lord, but I also know that ministry is administration, organisation, planning, communication and a hundred other things. When I brush aside the pile of work on my table to spend time with the Lord, then I feel guilty that I have not given attention to a host of urgent matters, and feel frustrated as I go through the day, dealing with things I have not given adequate thought to. But if I take on this pile, then I feel guilty that I am not spending adequate time in devotion and meditation.

I have heard the advice “Work smarter not harder” and there is value to it. I have also heard the advice “Live by your priorities”, and again there is value to it. But to be very honest with you . . . I feel like these disciples in Mark 6 - they had little or no control on their agenda . . . they were dealing with people who didn't fit into neat schedules, and who were lost and hungry.

Now it's not a totally hopeless situation, and there are practical things we can do to ease this tension somewhat. Furthermore, what I share with you today will not be the whole picture but just a part. I think you understand what I'm talking about. Interestingly, for those of us in the field, we probably think that the ones in support have it easier; after all they are dealing with office hours, and with controllable paper work. And those in the office think the ones on the field have it easier because they are dealing with people, ministering the word to them and so spending rich times in the Word.

Those of you who are housewives probably envy your husbands thinking that they get away and reflect quietly and deeply on the Word, while the husbands probably envy you thinking that after they leave the home, all you have to do is put the kids to sleep, make yourself a cup of tea, and sit for an hour and a half of undisturbed peace and meditation. The likelihood is that we don't understand each others' world and the tensions we face between being and doing.

It is this that I want to explore, and to explore through the model of Mark 6. What is my point? That there is hope for us! In Mark 6 the disciples never got their act together, they were on their way to Bethsaida, as the Lord had commanded them to do, and were too busy trying to save their own lives! They were obeying the Lord, but they had no time to stop and meditate, or pray, or read and reflect on the Word . . . Their circumstances would not allow them. I never-the-less find encouragement in this incident because, as you well realise, right in the middle of their frantic life saving efforts, the

Lord found them! It was he who came to them, and amazingly, when he came, they had a spiritual insight that was totally unrelated to their immediate circumstance, and insight that removed a hardness of their heart that had prevented them from understanding the matter of the loaves. And as a result they grew! He came through the storm, found them and brought peace, calm, understanding and refreshment to them. They were now ready to go on to the next set of ministry demands.

Consider it a gift when you keenly feel the tension between doing and being. It may be a positive sign of your awareness of God's call, a sign of your maturity in Christ, and one of the places where you may experience significant growth and renewal. We struggle because compassion for others compels us to act while the desire for intimacy with God compels us to flee into solitude. The struggle is a good one, and it is the absence of such struggle that we must beware of. Instead of letting it generate guilt in you, let it generate hope. Never-the-less we must strive for balance between being and doing; for when we find that balance, when every day includes the rhythm of prayer, action and reflection, then we would have found the key to faithful and fruitful ministry as we shall see on Sunday during our devotion.

I've titled this message "Finding God at Every Turn", it should actually be "God's Promise To Find Us In The Midst Of The Busy Storms Of Life". What I wish to do for the remainder of our time is to share with you 6 passages in the gospel and epistle of John on how God finds us in the middle of our storms. The focus of each of these 6 passages is the promise God has made that if you do these things, he himself will find you and dwell not just with you but in you! These 6 things become like a beacon, a signal calling out powerfully to him to come and abide with you. In this sense, these 6 things bring the presence of God powerfully into your circumstances, so that in your busyness you need not despair, but only welcome him into your storm.

WORD 1. Jn 6:56

⁵³ Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. ⁵⁶ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever." ⁵⁹ He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

What in the world could Jesus have meant? "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood . . ."

Context - The feeding the day before

Disciples were offended because the imagery was offensive and the law of Moses clearly said in Lev 17: 10 - 14

¹⁰ "Any Israelite or any alien living among them who eats any blood -- I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from his people. ¹¹ For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life. ¹² Therefore I say to the Israelites, "None of you may eat blood, nor may an alien living among you eat blood."

¹³ "Any Israelite or any alien living among you who hunts any animal or bird that may be eaten must drain out the blood and cover it with earth, ¹⁴ because the life of every creature is its blood. That is why I have said to the Israelites, "You must not eat

the blood of any creature, because the life of every creature is its blood; anyone who eats it must be cut off."

What Jesus meant - Feeding - daily and frequently for nourishment.

He interprets himself in vs. 63 *The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.*

And so we could interpret this as "My words are the bread of life, to nourish you spiritually and to refresh you. If you feed on my words, you will remain in me AND I WILL REMAIN IN YOU"

How then do we feed on the word of God?

Ill - My father's attitude to food without meat. (QT & Tue men's meeting)

Ill - Eating out at a restaurant Vs. eating at home (preparing sermon, translation, etc)

Ill - Going out for a business lunch (preaching, counselling, praying, etc)

Actually, there are many opportunities to feed. But we can be so caught up in the storm that we miss the Lord who is present with us. For his promise is that if we feed on his word, he will take up his abode with us!

WORD 2 Jn 14:23

²¹ Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him." ²² Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, "But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?" ²³ Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

I love this second promise ". . . *we will come to him and make our home with him.*" I love it because Jesus the Son, and God the Father, so clearly promise to come and live with me. It's as though if I obey his commands, almost immediately I can expect to hear 2 knocks on the door - God and Jesus saying they have come to live with me.

Now I can be so caught up in my obedience that I open the door and say to them "*Well it's all very well for you to come visiting now, please come in, take a seat, but I'm very busy so don't disturb me, don't complicate my life*"

Ill - This week with Bishop Majige.

But God's promise is that because we have obeyed him in extending hospitality, he will come and abide with us.

WORD 3 Jn 15:4

¹ "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. ⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

WORD 4 I Jn 4:13 - 16

¹³ We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. ¹⁶ And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.