

A Faith Formed in Footnotes
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A Sermon for Sardis Baptist Church
Mark 6:30-34; 50-53
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I'll admit it. I feel a little cheated. Upset even. The Revised Common Lectionary has kept us in the sixth chapter of Mark for the third consecutive week. And I put up with the stories of Jesus being rejected in his hometown, and the disciples shaking the dust off their feet, and the beheading of John the Baptist, because I was under the assumption that we were gettin' to the good stuff. In the second part of the chapter, Jesus feeds more than 5,000 people (remember there's no count on women and children so it was more like 15,000), and after that, he walks on the water. Walks on it, no skis or nuthin'!!!

And I was SO excited, because I was gonna get to tell you about how I believe, I really believe, I faith that such things happened. And you were gonna be like, "What you mean to say is that you think these stories are metaphors for God's unlimited power and creativity, right? And don't you think Jesus created a spirit of generosity that encouraged people to share their resources, and he made people feel like he could feed the multitudes and calm the seas? And these stories just affirm that, right? And you believe in science, right?"

And I was gonna be like, "Yes, of course, I believe in science. And yes, I believe in Evolution. And no, I don't think Jonah lived in the belly of a big fish for three days – that's a clear example of metaphor. And yes, I have no way to possibly explain to you how Jesus fed like he fed, and walked like he walked. But I DO mean to say that in these specific instances, scientific explanations just won't do. Because sometimes I need to believe the unbelievable, and be content in my incomprehension of our divine maker's ability to astound. And besides, I like a good story. SO yes, I believe he fed the multitudes and walked on water.

And some of you were gonna love that sermon. And some of you were gonna hate it. And some of you were gonna be like BLLLOOUUSSH, and your heads were gonna explode. And it was gonna be great!!!

But the lectionary strikes again. And instead of miracles, all we're left with are a few obscure footnotes.

I am disappointed, but not deflated. We can do a lot with footnotes. In some cases, the footnotes provide us with a sense of clarity and comprehension the headlines can't.

You'll remember that Jesus sent the disciples out 2x2 for some on-the-job training. He told them, "Go and do what I do. You've got the power to heal, and to manifest God's love right here and right now."

And so off they went. And they did what Jesus did. They healed many people and performed many exorcisms. And in the first part of our lection, they gather to tell Jesus all about it.

"Jesus," one says, "I met the kindest woman, who made THE best pound cake. And we talked. And we prayed. And she told me how much my presence meant to her. And she said that she could feel the spirit of God. And she said she really needed that!"

"Jesus," another one says, "I couldn't believe that God was working through me like that. It was surreal. I was so scared, and yet so calm, and so focused, and so empowered, all at the same time."

They told him the work was exhausting. How they'd barely slept or ate. And they didn't know where they'd found the energy to meet each new day. But somehow they had!

"And did you love it?" Jesus asked. "YESSS!!!" they replied. And Jesus invited them to rest, and tell him more. But just as they were settling in, there were lots of folks needing to be ministered to. And the text tells us that Jesus had compassion for them, and I suppose the disciples did, too. And Jesus and his disciples rested in acts of ministry.

Then, of course, we get the miracles, but we've touched on those. And then a final footnote.

They crossed the sea once more, but when they landed, something was different. It wasn't just Jesus that everyone recognized – the people knew the disciples, too. Remember in the beginning of the chapter, Jesus went to the most familiar of places, his hometown, but few recognized his power. A hemorrhaging woman touched the fringes of his robe in the hopes of finding healing. But she was the exception. The people did not believe.

At the end of the chapter, Jesus walks upon a new, less familiar shore. But these people recognize his power, and not just his power, but the power of his disciples, too. And everywhere they go, in fields and marketplaces and homes and walking paths, people reach out to touch the fringes of his robe. And their belief in God's power, present, right now, heals them.

Did you catch that? They aren't Jesus' friends and family. And they haven't seen his miracles up close. They are simply people who know the presence of God when they see it and feel it, and they choose to act on those feelings. And because they choose to believe and choose to act, they are witnesses to God's good news.

Don't get me wrong. I still wish the Lectionary committee would come to its senses and let us read the miracles in Year B. There's no doubt we sometimes need to hear about the extraordinary – It's hard to come up with crafts and songs and snacks for Vacation Bible School based on footnotes. And it's usually not the footnotes that inspire us to conversion or belief, and capture our imagination. We all need the myth.

But I suppose I can see why they had us read the footnotes today. Because we also need the ordinary. We need to know that we don't have to be Jesus to act like him. We too, can emulate Jesus in the way we love, in the way we offer hospitality, in the way we faith God's possibilities. And while we may never see five loaves broken into five thousand pieces, or a human being levitate above choppy water without the aid of technology, we can still recognize the presence of God in our midst. And we too can find healing.

When they write the history of Sardis Baptist Church (Maybe Tim's got a follow-up to his soon-to-be best seller!), I'm pretty sure it'll be short on pyrotechnics and other spectacles, and long on footnotes: Canned food drives, casseroles, rides to the bus station, listening partners, deep questions, \$10 donations, chocolate crosses, paragraph prayers and beautiful solos too good to pause and record, and acts of healing we hardly recognized. And the unfolding, behind-the-scenes drama of a people learning to be disciples of Jesus.

Hey Tim, I already know the title: *A Faith Formed in Footnotes*. May it be so! And may it be soon! Amen.