

“In a World Restarting: Getting our Bearing Coming out of Chaos”

Welcome to your Small Group - Week 5 (for the week following Sunday, Oct. 24th)

Thank you for taking time out of your day to come together for this final small group session! We hope these weeks in Mark’s gospel have been a place of wondering together about how we get our bearing as we continue in this pandemic. We are in the 3rd and final week of our stewardship theme of “Transform, Revive, & Heal” for ourselves, for our communities, and for our world. You have received your stewardship packets in the mail – a reminder that they are due at the end of the month!

This week we will continue our small group conversation with a focus on Mark 6:30-44. A reminder that Dr. Matt Skinner of Luther Seminary has made an 8 to 10-minute video for each week to introduce us to Sunday’s Gospel story. This is our last week of videos from Dr. Skinner until the new year when we will dive into Luke.

*+ **NOTE:** Each week we’ll suggest a question to open with, then turn to the Bible text for the week (with the video and a question from Dr. Skinner), and then suggest a few other questions to discuss as you ponder what it means for you to get your “bearings coming out of chaos”. Feel free to choose the questions that resonate most with your group, in any order you like. If you have time for all, great, but no worries if you don’t.*

Check-in: To be discussed in small groups or as a large group. What has been your biggest takeaway so far from this small group experience? What will you carry with you after you leave this group?

Bible reading this week: Mark 6:30-44

The twelve disciples have returned from a time of ministry (ie casting out demons, anointing and curing those who are sick), and Jesus tells them to go into the wilderness to get away and to rest. Instead of finding that rest, crowds follow them out to the wilderness. Jesus feels compassion on the crowd and begins to teach them. It grows late and the disciples tell Jesus to send the crowds away, but Jesus commands the disciples to feed the crowds. Despite only finding five loaves of bread and two fish, the disciples participate in this feeding miracle where everyone is satisfied and filled – not only was everyone fed, but there are baskets of leftovers!

+ Please listen to Dr. Skinner’s video on Mark 6:30-44 as a group if you haven’t had a chance yet. (Link each week is in Enews from Tuesday of last week and on the website on the homepage in the “In a World Restarting” box.) You can decide if you all want to listen to this together each week, or if you will listen beforehand.

Questions from Dr. Skinner's Video:

Dr. Skinner explains that, in this feeding miracle, the food was not just dropped in people's laps. The disciples participate in the distribution of food to the crowd. This story is about an invitation into an active role in God's work in the world. Jesus tells the disciples, who originally told Jesus to get rid of the people, that they are the ones who need to be part of the solution. Dr. Skinner invites us to shift away from "what will Jesus do for us?" toward "how will Jesus involve us?" What ways have you seen God's invitation into relationship with the neighbor? How have you and God partnered together in ministry in your relationships? Here at Westwood? In your local community? In the global community?

Dr. Skinner also points out a danger of interpretation of this feeding miracle through the lens of prosperity gospel. He describes prosperity gospel as - if you love Jesus enough and have enough faith, God will supply all of your needs, and money and health will flow your way. We encourage you to think of this story as more than success, money, and wealth coming to those who are faithful or who are good.

Coming out of chaos, ponder together:

1. At the end of this story, the disciples go around and fill twelve baskets with leftover pieces of bread and fish. Where they thought there wouldn't be enough, they were surprised to find an abundance of leftovers. Their expectations were exceeded. Share about a time when you felt God exceeded your expectations and surprised you with an abundant outcome. If you feel comfortable, share about a time when your expectations were not met and the outcome fell short of your expectations. There may be an impulse to also provide a lesson learned or a silver lining to the latter story – I want to give you permission to share without needing to also share a positive outcome.
2. We focus a lot on the feeding miracle in this text, and I want to call attention to the verse that talks about Jesus having compassion on this crowd, which leads him to teach and to provide the miracle. Jennifer T. Kaalund, Assistant Professor of New Testament at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, says this: "Jesus' compassion compels him to act. So, too, should it be with us. While we may feel sympathy for someone, how often does the emotion result in action?" For you, how often do your emotions of compassion result in actions of compassion? What barriers do you find in yourself when it comes to action? What gets in the way of taking action?
3. In what areas of your life do you find excess and abundance? Is it in your time? Your skills and abilities? Your personality – comfort, humor, etc? Your financial resources? Where are you currently sharing those? In light of the pandemic, are you considering redirecting any of those resources?

Close with prayer:

Share individual prayer requests as you feel comfortable. If someone wants to close in prayer, do that and/or pray the Prayer of Good Courage.

O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.