

Today's Bible reading, is one of **the** most **significant** passages in the whole of the New Testament... That's a **big** call, and I don't think **I** would have ever personally made that call, but **Jesus** is the one who draws our attention to it.

Out of **all** of the miracles that Jesus did, the feeding of the **5000**, and the feeding of the **4000**, are the **two** miracles that Jesus said, should have made it clear (to His disciples), who He was.

Throughout the Gospel of Mark, the disciples seem to be bumbling along, almost completely unaware, of who this Jesus bloke really is. Jesus keeps **demonstrating** who He is (by the things that He does), but they just don't seem to be 'getting it'...

So let me give you the ultimate 'spoiler', before we even begin:

The ultimate message of the Gospel of Mark, is "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God"...

That's what the feeding of the 5000, was supposed to reveal. But we're actually, we're not going to get there today... I've split this message over 2 weeks. So, let's see how far we get.

We begin at V30:

Jesus sent the disciples out on mission. They preached the need to repent; they cast out demons; They healed the sick... And now (in V30) they've come back to Jesus, and He tells

them, “Look, it’s time for a bit of time out.” **“Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.”**

BTW:
*Probably the last place any of **us** would want to go for a bit of time-out, is somewhere described as “a desolate place”, after this week of 40-odd°C days, coming at the end of a year where we only got 60% of our average annual rainfall (It’s already pretty desolate out here).*

But the desolate place Jesus took his disciples, well it wasn’t a desert – they sat down on green grass beside a fresh-water lake. It was an unpopulated place. He took them for time out (a bit of R&R), away from it all... Sounds inviting, doesn’t it.... Anybody want to join them???

There are 2 common errors when it comes to Christian Retreat, R&R: Some of us want way too **much** of it, and some of us never have **any** of it... And so some of us get ‘burnt out’, and others of us ‘never get lit’ to begin with.

- It is a necessary thing, and **good** thing, to have time out, away from work;
- it is a good thing, to have time out, away from constant ministry;
- away from evangelising;
- away from our regular serving...
- It’s good, sometimes, to just **be** (without always having to ‘do’) –
- to **be** alone with God –
- to **be** alone with other Christians, and
- to just have a bit of a rest for a while...

BTW:

This is a very convenient time for this passage to come up for me (And no, I didn't plan it this way) ... But, in 1 week and 1 day, Robyn and I are going to go away for 2 weeks, to have a bit of time out... And that's OK. Isn't God good, that He allows us to have time out...

And no, it's not selfish. I **can** have a break without being selfish, and **you** can too... This was the practice of Jesus, and this was the practice that He tried to pass on to His disciples...

The problem is though, sometimes we get a bit 'all too precious' about our time out.

- Some pastors are **militant** about their day off – they fiercely guard their day off – **nothing** – no pastoral crisis – no opportunity to minister, can **ever** interfere with their day off. They won't answer the church phone...

Someone knocks on the door, "Pastor, I'm at my wits end – What can God do in my life?"...

"I'm so glad you popped in. It's my day off today, but come back tomorrow, and we'll chat..."

You think I'm joking... No, I'm not... Some pastors are fiercely protective of their day off.

- I've met ministers who, when they're on holiday, they never go to church, because 'they're on holidays', and for them, "church" is work, and so they don't visit their Christian brothers and sisters and worship with them,

because ‘they’re on holidays’...

BTW:

I hope when you’re on holidays, that you **don’t** have a holiday from church... It is so wonderful to visit another church, and to connect with your brothers and sisters in Christ, and to share in fellowship in the name of Jesus.

So: It **is** a good thing to have time out.

But you know what??? Because God is God, sometimes He breaks in to our plans, and Because God is God, He has every right to do so. ...

Sometimes, when you go somewhere to just be alone, and get away from it all, and even to pray, sometimes God brings someone along, that completely upsets all of your solitude...

Yes, it is good to have time out... But sometimes, a God-ordained-opportunity, presents itself, and it completely interrupts our retreat... And at that point, we have a choice to make: Am I going to connect with what God is doing in this person’s life, and allow God to use me, or am I going to be selfish and be all ‘very precious’ about having my time out?

I sat down on a plane once, from Sydney to Moree. I don’t get away very often, but I got a chance to go away to a church conference... And after a very busy week, I was pretty tired, and I was on the home straight. From Moree, it’s only a 2.5hr drive to home, and I was expecting to have an hour of peace and quiet on the plane before we got there.

But instead, from before the plane left the tarmac, until we disembarked, I had a non-stop God-conversation with a lady (who wasn't a Christian), but she was seeking God, and I believe God did something in her heart that day...

Was this, an interruption to my time-out? Yes it was... But it was also the highlight of my day – Why??? Because it is so satisfying to see God at work in a person's heart, and it's so exciting, to be used by God, through such a conversation...

In Acts 24, it says that God has determined when each of us will live, and the exact places that we will live, so that we would seek Him, and perhaps reach out for Him, and find Him... Do you know what that tells me: God puts each of us, in the place that we need to be, to give us every opportunity to come to faith in Him.

And sometimes, God is doing that for another person, when He brings them into your life (even when you're having a retreat), so that **you** can impact them, for Him...

They may very well interrupt your time-out. They might even interrupt your quiet time – interrupt your Bible reading – interrupt your prayer time. And that's what God does. For a fleeting moment, He brings one person, into the sphere of another person, because **one** of them knows Him, and the **other** one is seeking Him, and perhaps, in that encounter, the one who is seeking Him, might reach out and find Him...

There's no hard work here; There's no massive planning; or preparation required.... All we have to do, is recognise that God is at work, and be available. Don't be precious about your time out... Yes, having 'time out' **is** a good thing, but

it's even better, when God makes an opportunity, for you to have an impact in someone else's life...

And that's what happened here... Jesus has organised this lovely retreat for the disciples – they're in the boat, out on the water with Jesus... Heading for the shore over the other side where there's green grass... It's an isolated place, hardly anyone around... Ahhh, it's going to be special...

But they were spotted... And it seems they were mostly men, and perhaps they had to be men, because they hot-footed it there, and on foot, hiking around the lake (16,600ha 41,000ac), they managed to get around the other side, before the Jesus team arrived in the boat.

And as the story unfolds, I get the impression that the disciples were pretty disappointed. They were looking forward to this restful time out, but now, it all abruptly ends. And they were none too pleased that the masses had gate-crashed their retreat.

But we're told, that when **Jesus** saw the great crowd, **he had compassion on them**, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

They were lost. They had no direction.

Now, I want to make a point here: Not **every** unbeliever, is like a sheep without a shepherd... A sheep without a shepherd, is someone who is genuinely seeking God... These people had done a solid march, to get there, to see Jesus...

They were seeking God alright, but they hadn't made the connection yet...

And I make this distinction because there is a time for preaching – there is a time to stand on the street corner, and call **everyone** to repentance before God... **And** there's time for rest and solitude... But if God brings someone who is genuinely seeking Him, into your place of rest and solitude, well, forget your rest. The most encouraging thing for you at this point, is to connect with what God is doing, and have an impact of eternal significance, for Him...

Anyway, Jesus has compassion because they were like sheep without a shepherd. What did He do for them???

- Did He set up a clinic to counsel them? No.
- Did He create a 'safe place' for them, and run a few relational-building activities? No.
- Did He go and have pastoral conversations with each individual person? No
- Did He have a time of sharing of feelings, so that everyone could feel they were fully involved?

No. He **taught** them...

And He didn't just teach them for 20 minutes or so... He had so much compassion for these sheep in need of a shepherd, He taught them "**many** things", and He was still going, when it grew late...

....

This church, Bush Disciples, is unashamedly, primarily, a teaching ministry. If you don't like being taught the Word of God, you're in the wrong church...

Teaching:

- Teaching the way **to** Jesus;
- Teaching the ways **of** Jesus;
- Teaching the way of **discipleship**,

is so important... All sheep need to be shepherded... And how does shepherding happen? Through teaching.

Now, to some of us, that'll be very appealing – we **love** the Word of God, and we love to be **taught** from the Word of God. But others, not so much. Some of us don't **like** to be taught; Some of us don't feel we **need** to be taught.

I'll let you in on a little secret: **I** need to be taught. Some of you may be under the impression, “Michael just knows this stuff”, “And he can get up there each week and speak...” Not at all... It takes me at least 2 full days to prepare each weekly message... Every week before I preach:

- I read the Scriptures (over and over again, I read them), seeking God, to teach me through His word;
- I read commentaries. Highly respected Bible Scholars, who have made it their life's work, to learn and teach, the word of God, teach through their commentaries. And I read these commentaries, so I can be taught the word of God; and
- Sometimes, I get the opportunity to listen to recorded sermons, so that I can be taught by other preachers...

.... Why do I do this? Because without good, solid Bible teaching, disciples of Jesus, are like sheep in need of a shepherd – **me** included.... **I** need to be shepherded, and **you**

need to be shepherded. I need to be taught the ways of God, you need to be taught the ways of God...

That's why Bush Disciples began..... Out in the Bush, there are lots of sheep, scattered throughout vast regions, (sometimes of minute population density)... These sheep can be spiritually, very lonely, and they need to be shepherded – they are disciples of Jesus, needing to be taught...

Big city churches, have plenty of resources to feed their sheep every week, but who's going to feed God's sheep out in the bush?... And that's why God brought Bush Disciples into being...

I have a bit of a smile whenever I see a BD bank statement of donations that people have given, to support what we do here – I don't smile because we have an enormous income – in fact, there's only enough to fund us as a part-time ministry...

This is why I smile:

One couple who now live away from here, every week, they download the teaching and listen to it, and they tell people further out in the sticks about it, and they're a tremendous support to us,,,, And their regular tithe on the bank statement, is described as "Fed Sheep" ... Don't you love that? "Fed Sheep" ...

They really value the bible teaching God provides, and they want to see Sheep out in the bush being fed, and so they support us by tithing...

BTW, if you're listening to this, and you see the value of Bible teaching for people in the bush, you too can support what this

little church is doing in the Name of Jesus... Just go to our web site bushdisciples.church, and you'll find how to support us there...

Sheep without a shepherd, need to be taught. You need to be taught; I need to be taught; People in the city; and people out in the sticks need the teaching of Jesus too...

If the People of God do not have a diet of good, solid Bible teaching, they're like sheep without a shepherd.

What do sheep without a shepherd look like? What happens to them?

- Well, some will stray;
- Some will go where the picking seems green;
- They're in danger of being attacked by wolves;
- Sometimes they'll just hang around the water trough, and they don't move, when they need to move;
- They get worms;
- they get flyblown;
- and they get lost...

Something Dad taught me about mustering sheep, is they like to walk into the wind. If you go out into a big paddock to muster, just assume that they've walked into the wind, and they'll be up that end of the paddock... And over the years, through my experience, that's usually been the case... Of course, in a smaller paddock, they'd walk into the wind, until they hit the fence, and then they'd turn around and come back...

But the point I'm making, is sheep without a shepherd, left to their own devices, follow the wind.

In Ephesians 4, Paul says that Jesus:

¹¹ gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹² to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

¹⁴ Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.

Without teaching – without shepherding:

- we're at the risk of following the wind of teaching that isn't the gospel...
- It's easy to stray;
- We wander off after a bit of green pick – a few feel-good platitudes of no substance, easily distract us;

You see, Good solid teaching:

- it keeps our faith strong;
- it urges us into mission;

- it guards against false teaching and destructive heresies;
and
- it always keeps Jesus Christ at the centre...

Sheep without a shepherd, very quickly fixate on themselves, and wander off in their own direction, whereas the shepherd holds them together.

Righto, so Jesus was a shepherd to them, and He taught them a lot. It got late, and it was time for a physical feed. And I'm sorry about this, and I feel like I'm leaving it a bit 'up in the air', but this is where we're going to stop, and pick it up again next week, with the feeding of the 5000.

Questions?????

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father,

We want to thank you for the gift you give, of rest.
Sometimes we get so fixated on our work;
we get so fixated on our ministry;
we get so fixated on everything we **do**,
we forget to just **be**.

And Lord, I want to thank you,
that you lead us to places of rest;

You lead us to moments of 'time out'.

Your restore our soul.

And Lord, just as the moment of rest for those disciples,
was the journey with you in the boat,

Lord, be with us, in our journeys, and we rest.

But Lord, help us to never be 'selfish' or 'precious',
or fiercely protective of this rest.

Lord, we are Yours;

Time is Yours;

Even our restoring rest is Yours.

And Lord, we are willing for You to break into our rest,

so that we can be used by You,

to bring someone who is seeking,

closer to faith in You.

And Lord, we want to thank You,

that You don't leave us as sheep without a shepherd.

We thank You, that You provide teachers,

to keep us as Your flock.

We thank You, for all of those teachers,

who over the years, have continued to guide us and keep us,

on the path of discipleship; and

have urged us on in mission; and

kept us on the straight and narrow...

Lord Jesus Christ, we thank You,

And we ask that You would continue to teach us.

in Jesus' Name,

Amen.