



Sermon Title: RSVP

Mark 6:30-34

Speaker: Dr. Scott Dudley

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The scripture comes from Mark chapter 6, "The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to them all they had done and taught. Then they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place, but many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. By this time, it was late in the day, so His disciples came to Him. 'This is a remote place,' They said, 'and it's already very late. Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.' But He answered, 'you give them something to eat.' They said, 'That would take more than half a year's wages.'"

"How many loaves do you have?"

"'Five and two fish.' Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties and taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven. He gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then He gave them to His disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up 12 basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish, and the number of the men who had eaten was 5,000."

A while back, my wife and I were at an outdoor restaurant, and there were these little holders that contained packets of both real sugar and artificial sugar all mixed up together. Birds would land on empty tables, and they would pick through the sugar packets, discard the fake sugar, and only take the real sugar. They knew the difference. What super clever birds, and also super picky birds. These are the ones that in bird Starbucks are saying things like, "I'd like a hint of lavender with my latte, please." They knew the difference between real and fake. Do you? Do I? Do we? Do we know the difference between what Jesus calls the abundant life, the overflowing life, and the fake substitutes of our culture? Do we know the difference between those two?

This summer, as a church, we're all following the same Bible reading plan through the Book of Mark. And a part of this week's assignment included the story I just read where Jesus miraculously feeds 5,000 people with just a little bit of bread and fish. But as you did this week's reading, you might also have noticed the story that comes right before this one, where King Herod has John the Baptist beheaded at a banquet to please his dinner guests. Mark puts these two stories right together on purpose as a deliberate contrast because both stories are about a feast, in a way, Herod's and Jesus', but they're very different kinds of feasts. One represents what our culture calls the good life versus what Jesus calls the abundant life that only he can give.

Years ago, I preached a sermon called Herod's Feast about these two stories. I'm not going to repeat that sermon. This one's different, but I am going to compare the two because Mark puts them together on purpose to be compared. The story about King Herod that comes right before the feeding of the 5,000 says this, "King Herod had given orders to have John the Baptist put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother, Philip's wife, whom he had married." That's messed up. Because, see, what happened was, Herod had committed adultery with his brother's wife, whose name was Herodias, and convinced her to leave his brother and marry him instead.

I bet Thanksgiving dinner was real interesting in their family. What do you think? What's worse is, she was also his niece, "So he had John arrested because John had been saying to Herod, 'It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife, who's also your niece.' So Herodias," that's Herod's niece wife, "nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him, but she wasn't able to because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and a holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled. Yet he liked to listen to him." Liked to listen to the preacher who kept pointing out his sin. How many of you like to listen to a preacher who keeps pointing out your sin? Because I can do that all day long if you like.

"Finally, the opportune time came. On his birthday, Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee." I love that. Let's have a party about me, and all the important people will be there, "When the daughter of Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests, the king said to the girl, 'Ask me for anything you want, and I'll give it to you up to half my kingdom.'" That is a stupid thing to say, isn't it? "She said to her mother, 'What shall I ask for?'"

"The head of John the Baptist.' She answered. So the daughter goes to Herod and says, 'Give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter.'" Which is a really like, "Right now, not later, now, on a platter." As though it were part of the dinner dishes or something, "The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oath and dinner guests, he don't want to look foolish in front of them. He didn't want to refuse her. So he sends an executioner out who beheads John the Baptist and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl and she gave it to her mother."

"Here, mom, I have a present for you." So these two feasts, Jesus' and Herod's, represent two different things. The good life on the one hand and the abundant, overflowing life that only Jesus can give us on the other, fake sugar versus real sugar. What disturbs me about me is, had I been invited to both of those feasts, I probably would've gone to Herod's because we're new, food, all the important people are there. The A-list, celebrities on the red carpet, the kind of people who give air kisses to each other, mwah, mwah. Call each other, darling. Those kinds of people. Jesus' feast, what's that? 5,000 hungry people, and you have to feed them. It's bread and fish. There's no filet mignon, no pie, no cake, no, no, no, no, no. Herod's party was where it's at. There's just one problem with Herod's feast, though. It ends in death. It's all fun and games until someone brings in a head on a platter and kind of kills the mood like, "Oh, I don't know. It was having a great time until the head showed up. That was weird." But Jesus Feast ends in abundance, basketfuls leftover.

But see, Herod looks like he's having fun. Herod's feast looks like it's great, but by the end of the party, not so much fun because that whole severed head thing's a buzzkill. Herod looks powerful, but he's not powerful. He can't stand up to his wife, can't stand up to his dinner guest, can't stand up to anyone. He's not even a real king. He's a puppet king the Romans installed. He has to do whatever they say, and yet we still gravitate toward Herod's table because it just looks better to us than what Jesus has to offer. Because what Jesus offers is harder. It's just plain old harder. There's no sugar coating. It's just harder. Yet it has some amazing benefits. For starters, Jesus' feast unmasks the lies of culture. At first, Herod's feast looks really good because, see, Satan never tempts us with something that looks bad. If he did, we wouldn't do it. He only tempts us with things that look good.

Now we can see the dysfunction in what's going on with Herod there because we're not part of that culture. But they didn't... They thought it all looked great. Everything about it they thought was great. They'd even normalize the whole niece-wife thing. They'd normalize that. It all looked good to them. We sometimes view destructive things as fun or good. We're brainwashed by our culture, but at the end of Jesus' feast, it says they all ate and were satisfied. Satisfied. That's a really important word, satisfied. I doubt that people left Herod's party satisfied. Entertained maybe at best, but also maybe feeling a little bit empty because they hadn't really made a real connection with anybody or maybe even thinking, "Oh gosh, all the important people were there. Did I wear the right clothes?" And, "Ooh, I said that stupid thing in front of everybody." Ever leave a party like that? Is it just me? That's sad.

So often, the things we chase after don't actually satisfy. The excitement of the new car, the new kitchen, the new house, whatever, it wears off. If we go from sexual partner to sexual partner, we're going to be unsatisfied because what we're really looking for is intimacy, and that's not it. No, Jesus' feast unmasked the lies of culture and leads us to what satisfies. Second, Jesus' feast offers ultimate freedom because Herod is not free. His

niece-wife knew that what he really feared the most was loss of face in front of powerful people. She knew that because appearing powerful was what gave Herod a sense of security, made him feel good about himself, and because that was the foundation of his life, he's a slave to it, terrified of losing it. He's not free at all.

If anything other than Jesus is how we feel secure and good about ourselves, school, career, money, popularity, politics, we're slaves to it. And all of those things can be good things unless they become the ways that we feel good about ourselves. Contrast that to John the Baptist. The center of his life is God. That was his identity, and as a result, he's not afraid of anything. He could do the right thing even at the risk of death, whereas Herod can't do the right thing at the risk of looking foolish at a cocktail party. He's afraid of his wife, afraid of his followers, afraid of the crowd. He's all messed up in his sexual relationships, and the sad thing is, deep down, he knows it. Deep down, he knows it. That's why he likes to listen to John preach to him about his sin.

Something in John's speech attracted him. Something inside of him wanted the freedom that John had because John's not afraid of anything, not even death, which makes him more powerful than Caesar because a tyrant's number one weapon is always death. They can get you to do anything by threatening to kill you. But once you're not afraid of death, you have disarmed the tyrant, and now you're free. So John makes Herod see that there's something to live for besides status, power, money, fame, and popularity. Those are good things. They're just smaller compared to what Jesus calls us into. Which brings me to the third benefit of Jesus' feast, and that is adventure and purpose. The people at Herod's feast are just passive recipients of food and entertainment, but Jesus' disciples are active, and they're involved. They're part of the miracle. The first line of the story says the apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to them all they had done and taught.

So at the beginning of chapter 6, Jesus had sent His disciples out to preach and heal people and all this stuff, and now they're back telling Him all the adventures and the miracles that they've got to be a part of. They're active. They're not passive. They're having an adventure. It's not boring. It doesn't say that the church attendees gathered around Jesus and reported to Him all the sermons they'd heard. It doesn't say the committee members gathered around Jesus and reported to them all the things they'd committed to death. They told Him about all their adventures of making this earth more like God's heaven, something bigger to live for than the next vacation, promotion, college acceptance, whatever. Again, those things aren't bad. They're just small.

You'll probably forget this sermon by dinnertime. Or maybe I'm just fooling myself. Some of you'll probably forget it by lunch. Some of you may be blotting it out word by word, even as I'm speaking it. But do you think those disciples ever forgot the day they fed 5,000 people with just a little bit of bread and fish? Jesus' feast unmask the lies of our culture, sets us free, gives us meaning and adventure. Finally, Jesus Feast gives us real power. These two stories back-to-back are a study in power. In Herod, we see fake power

out of control. In Jesus, we see real power, healing, and transforming. See, earthly power can only do one of two things. It can only do evil or stop evil from happening, but it cannot bring real, lasting good. With power, we can compel people to do good things, but we can't change their hearts. But Jesus' power restores all things, including human hearts, to what God always intended for them, and that's real power. If we follow Him, that power can flow through us as well.

When the disciples see the crowd of people, they say to Jesus, "It's already very late. Send the people away so they can go, by themselves, something to eat." This is one of my favorite lines in scripture, like, "Ministry is great, Jesus, except for the people. Send them away." But He answered them, "You give them something to eat." And in the original Greek, it emphasizes the word you. It's basically roughly translated, "You. Yeah, you. I'm talking to you. You give them something to eat. You're part of this thing." They said to Him, "That would take more than half a year's wages." Jesus said, "How many loaves do you have?"

"Five and two fish." Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. So His disciples organized the people. They distribute the food. He involves them. They get to be part of this miracle. See, Jesus is saying, "I will do the impossible by My power through you." At Jesus' feast, the power of Jesus flows through us, and it's not the power to get what we want or get ahead. It's not that small. That's Herod's feast. It's the power to do nothing less than make this earth more like God's heaven, where hunger, as in this story, and poverty and suffering are banished. Herod's power leaves this world just the same old, same old. Jesus' power changes everything, and we get to be part of that. The reason for that is because Jesus is a very different kind of king. We've got two kings in these two stories.

See, our choice is not whether or not we're going to follow a king. We are all following some kind of king. Our cultures, expectations, political scripts, expectations of friends, family, we're all following a king. The question is, is it Jesus, or is it Herod? But Jesus is a very different kind of king. The text says that Jesus, taking the five loaves and the two fish, gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then He gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to His disciples. Does that language sound familiar to you? Because we say it once a month, every time we have communion, Jesus took bread, and after giving thanks, He broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "This is My body given for you."

This story foreshadows communion, where we celebrate Jesus' death and resurrection. See, Herod's feast ends in the death of other people. Jesus' feast ends in his death on a cross to pay the price for our sins so we can be reconciled to God and live with him forever. Herod will not do that for you. Career will not do that for you. Popularity will not do that for you. Money will not do that for you. Entertainment will not do that for you. Vacations will not do that for you. Nobody will do that for you but Jesus.

So action steps for this week. Action steps. First, continue the Bible reading plan of Mark to see just how different a kind of king Jesus is and how much more abundant the feast he offers is. Then second, as you go through this week, RSVP to Jesus' feast. Because every day we are given invitations to both Herod's feast and Jesus' feast. Some gossip happening in the work, at school, or in the neighborhood, that gossip, that's an invitation to join in and be part of Herod's feast or gracefully change the subject and lead the conversation to something more life-giving, temptation to spend money on one more thing we don't actually need or give that money to someone who really needs it and have the joy of making a difference in someone's life, listening to a friend that's in need, tutoring a student, struggling in school, mentoring someone else, every day we get invitations to both feasts, RSVP to Jesus.

There's a church in California that's in a really rough neighborhood, and they've adopted one of the roughest high schools in the entire state of California that's also in the same neighborhood as this church. 40% of the students in this school are from group home or the foster care system, don't have an adult in their life at all. There's a lot of gangs. There's a lot of drugs. Several of the church members volunteered to help coach the football team, and they were appalled at the state of the locker room. So they organized the church to help refurbish the locker rooms. One of the young men who's on the football team, they were all required to help in this project. He had a really hard life, multiple group homes, no adult who cared about him, asked the lady next to him why she was refurbishing the locker rooms.

This church member said, "Because I love you." And this young man laughed, and he said, "Nobody loves me." And so this woman set her paintbrush down and went over to this teenage football player and hugged him. And he said, "Nobody has hugged me in seven years." Which is a painfully specific number. It wasn't just, "Nobody's hugged me in years." It means there was a hug seven years prior, and he remembered it, but it was the last one he ever had. So she wasn't done. She called over a bunch of the other women, and one by one, they started to hug this teenage football player who also happened to be in a gang. By the time they were done hugging him to death, he was in tears. Over the next few months, as he got to know these church people, as he got to know Jesus better, the things that once seemed really interesting to him, like gangs and drugs and all the Herod's feast stuff, seemed a lot less interesting compared to what he's experiencing with Jesus and in this community, because he was making real connections with people who actually loved him.

After that, the pastor started organizing the church, and the goal was to have 15 caring adults per each student in that high school. He lined up men to mentor and be stand-in dads to teenage guys who didn't have a dad or whose dad was not a good role model. Some of those relationships went really, really deep with these men, loving these teenage guys as though they were their own sons, making them part of their family. Some of the teenage guys fiercely loved these men, who became the dads they'd always longed for,

so much so that when they talked about it, often their eyes would fill with tears. Pastor did the same thing, organized women to do the same thing for the girls in that school. Those relationships also went really deep.

Jesus has become very real to some of those students in that high school, but also to the church folk, because suddenly it wasn't just about going to church. It was about Jesus power flowing through them to change even the most difficult lives, places, and spaces, community, meaning, real connection, purpose, hope, joy. Yes, it was harder. Of course, it was harder. It involved sacrifice from those adults to get out of their comfort zone, gangs, drugs, that sort of thing. They had to give time. They had to give energy. They had to give money. They had to give their love to teenagers who maybe didn't always show that they were thankful, but they got these deep, lifelong relationships and saved and transformed a bunch of lives. I'm pretty sure they would all say they prefer Jesus' feast to Herod's feast because Herod's feast ends in death, but Jesus' feast is basketfuls of abundance.

I don't know about you, but I have all too often eaten at Herod's table, and I'm still not full. I believe there is nothing at that banquet that can really satisfy me. Only Jesus can. Jesus, who said, "I have come that they may have life and have it." How? Have it abundantly. Not in little bits and dabs and pieces, not measured out in teaspoons, but pressed down, heaped up, overflowing the measure, life more than enough worth, plenty left over. So you can have all this world. Just give me Jesus.

So, Lord, thank You for the invitations You give us to be part of what You're doing in our lives and in our world. Lord, this week, starting right now, starting as we get in our cars, give us eyes to see Your invitations to Your feast, to be part of what You're doing in our lives and in our world. Help us see it. Then, Lord, help us. Give us the courage to step into it and see all the good things that happen when we follow You. Wean us away. Woo us away from Herod's table to Yours, to the bigger, richer, deeper thing that you promise, and we will give You all the glory. In your name, Jesus, amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- What was a time when you had to do something that you thought was impossible? What happened?
- What are some reasons Jesus might work with ordinary people and things when he does miracles?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.