Good morning church family. It is good to be with you this morning, whether you are here in person or joining us online. I'm sure many of you know who I am, but for those of you who do not, my name is Tony and I am one of the pastors here at The Bride Church. I primarily lead our worship teams, but my wife and I also coach home group leaders and serve in other ways here as well. Pastor Bob is serving with Hearts Being Healed right now which means I have the opportunity and honor to open God's Word before you this morning. He mentioned a few weeks ago that I was going to speak when he was out with Covid on the desolate place that Jesus sent His disciples to for rest before the feeding of the 5000, and then I found myself living in a desolate place of my own when I had a positive Covid test. It just so happens that we find ourselves in a desolate place again and there is another miraculous feeding. This time there are 4000 men, plus women and children who are fed.

Before we dig into the Scripture today, I just want to say how blessed I have been to learn from all our elders. Pastor Bob, Pastor Craig, Brent, Marty, and Arnold have all taught me so much, and I've grown and learned from you all as well. My family and I have been here for a little over two years and it has been incredible to watch each one of us grow and stretch here. One of the things I've been learning recently from Pastor Bob is how to be vulnerable with others. I usually don't show a lot of emotion, and I tend to keep a lot of things close to my chest and not let people in. I don't know if you've noticed this over the past few weeks, but Pastor Bob has mentioned in his sermons that he is just preaching from where he is right now. That's what I want to do today. I just want to preach from where I am right now. I don't want to hide behind Greek words or 3 points that all start with the same letter. I want to share where I am and how this passage from Mark is speaking to me in the season that I am in. This is a raw, #nofilter kind of message.

I was looking back through some of my past messages and just about a year ago I shared a message called Praise* In Every Circumstance. I shared about struggling with depression during the complete isolation phase of the pandemic and how my mentor gave me some practical steps to move forward out of that place. What I didn't share then is that I had lost one of my uncles to suicide just two months prior. Since that time, I can't count how many memorial services I have been a part of here at The Bride or other churches in the community. And I want you to know that it has been an honor to serve each one of those families. I led worship for another memorial service just yesterday. I haven't known all of those who have passed, but some I have. Even those I did not know, I joined the family in mourning. This past year, my mentor who had helped me through so much passed away with cancer. And just over a week ago, I lost another uncle to cancer. My father was one of eight children, and now there are only three left. I don't share all this because I want your pity. I share it so that you can have a glimpse of where I am coming from today. You might call it my red dot or location as I read and studied the passage we are looking at today.

If you have your Bible with you, turn to Mark, chapter 8. If you don't have a Bible with you or the Bible app on your phone, there are Bibles available under a number of seats as well. As you are turning to Mark 8, I'd like to retrace where we've been recently. Jesus and His disciples have been going back and forth across the Sea of Galilee, casting out demons, healing the sick, teaching, and feeding thousands of people. Up to this point, they spend most of their time in or near Jewish regions. In Mark 7, after the interaction with the Pharisees, Jesus travels

deep into the Gentile region of Tyre and Sidon, then back to the Sea of Galilee in the region of Decapolis, which is another Gentile region. If we compare this to the account in Matthew's Gospel, we learn that a crowd was growing again as people brought the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others to Him for healing. And that's where we pick up today.

> **Mark 8:1-10**
> 1 In those days, when again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat, he
> called his disciples to him and said to them, 2 "I have compassion on the crowd, because
> they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. 3 And if I send them
> away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way. And some of them have come
> from far away." 4 And his disciples answered him, "How can one feed these people with
> bread here in this desolate place?" 5 And he asked them, "How many loaves do you
> have?" They said, "Seven." 6 And he directed the crowd to sit down on the ground. And
> he took the seven loaves, and having given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his
> disciples to set before the people; and they set them before the crowd. 7 And they had a
> few small fish. And having blessed them, he said that these also should be set before
> them. 8 And they ate and were satisfied. And they took up the broken pieces left
> over, seven baskets full. 9 And there were about four thousand people. And he sent
> them away. 10 And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the
> district of Dalmanutha.

One of the things we've been learning through this study of Mark is how to slow down the Scripture and sink into what God wants to say to us. As I read through this passage a few times, I was struck by how many similarities there are between the feeding of the 5,000 in chapter six and the feeding of the 4,000 that we just read.

- There was a great crowd.
- Jesus had compassion on them.
- The disciples point out that it is a desolate place, and they don't know how to feed so many people.
- Jesus asks how much bread they have.
- Bread and fish are available, but it's definitely not enough for everyone.
- Jesus blesses the food or gives thanks and breaks the bread.
- Jesus instructs the disciples to distribute the food.
- Everyone ate and was satisfied.
- Baskets of leftovers were collected.
- There is a boat trip across the Sea of Galilee right after the meal.

There are a few differences as well:

- In the first account, the disciples were resting by themselves when the crowd assembled around Jesus. His disciples came to Him when it was getting late that day and suggested that He send them away to get their own food. In the second account, the disciples

were already with Jesus, and the crowd had been there for 3 days. It's also Jesus that gets the conversation started about food instead of the disciples.

- When Jesus fed the 5,000+, He had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. This time, Jesus has compassion because they've been with Him for three days and have nothing to eat.
- The first time around, the disciples are almost sarcastic when they ask if they should go spend 200 days' wages on bread for the crowd. This time they simply ask how it's even possible to feed this many people in the middle of nowhere.
- There was a bigger crowd the first time, but less bread and fish to begin with. It's almost like Jesus wanted the disciples to make it happen and gave them a head start.

Beyond the similarities and differences between the two miracles, it's the words of Jesus that stood out to me the most as I read. Let me read verses 2-3 again.

Mark 8:2-3

2 "I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. 3 And if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way. And some of them have come from far away."

The first thing I notice is that the crowd had been with Jesus for 3 days. If this were the first time I was reading through any of the 4 Gospels, the idea of 3 days might not seem significant to me. And maybe there shouldn't be much read into this idea of the crowd being with Jesus for 3 days, but it's not something I can just ignore. When I was first thinking through where the feeding of the 4,000 might lead this message, I thought 3 days was going to be a significant piece of the message. But God wanted something else to stick to my ribs more. So I read it again and again.

What I noticed next is that Jesus had compassion on the crowd. In this season that I've been in, this is the most significant thing that God is speaking to me. He cares about me. He understands the burdens that I try to carry on my own. He not only has empathy and sympathy, but He has experienced and truly knows my pain and my struggles.

This crowd had been with Jesus for 3 days without food. I start feeling hunger pains around 3 hours, but I've fasted for 30 hours at a time. That doesn't mean I know the struggle they were dealing with. Jesus went 40 days in a desolate place without food or water. He knows their struggle at the most intimate level and He has compassion on them. Maybe you are in a desolate place right now. You might feel lonely or abandoned or that God is not even there for you. Maybe you're angry because of the injustices of this world or the pain of losing someone you love. Or maybe everything is ok right now and you're starting to tune me out. The thing about following Christ is that trouble is bound to show up at some point. And if you're like me, you might compile the struggle by thinking about hard times from your past.

When my uncle passed away, I started thinking about all the family members that I've lost over the years. I have no grandparents left. I never knew my dad's sister, Gayle. One of my cousins passed away in a car accident when she was a teenager. My dad died shortly after he

turned 60. Uncle Gary was 61, Uncle Gregg was 64, and mosdt recently, Uncle Gordon passed away at 57.

Jesus lost his friend, Lazarus, and the Bible says that He when He was given the news. I think that means He cried ugly tears, even though He knew that He was going to bring him back to life. The pain I feel from losing my family, friends, and mentor is real, but I can't imagine the pain of those in our church family who have lost their children. Is there any justice to be found in losing a child? No!

But God knows and understands and feels all of that pain. God, our Father, not only lost His Son in an unjust way, He gave Him so that we might be justified through His death. And when Jesus was hanging on that cross, being crucified unjustly for the sins of the world, He cried out to the Father with a prayer of deep lament: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" **Mark 15:34**, echoing the lament of Psalm 22.

There is much in this world to lament, and it is good to cry out to God in that way. I wrote my own prayer or psalm of lament last week, longing for God to intervene in the strife and division that surrounds us and block Satan from stealing, killing, and destroying any more. I'll share that raw prayer in the message notes online this week. It came out of a place of emotional and physical exhaustion, and as I wrote it, I thought about the authors of lament Psalms in the Bible and what they might have been enduring. I'm tired of living in this desolate place, but I have a hope to cling to. God knows what I am going through and has compassion on me. Even when I don't feel like He is close, almost as if He's abandoned me, I know that He still has compassion on me.

Imagine you are in that crowd of people. Maybe you were one of the people who was healed on the first day, but now you've been pushed out to the outskirts of the crowd. You can't even see Jesus from where you are and the only reason you know that He is still there is because you heard someone say He's there. You and your friends forgot to pack food when you left home, so it's been more like 4 days since you last ate.

In that moment, do you feel like Jesus has forgotten about you? Do you feel abandoned? Sure, you were healed a couple days ago, but what good is that if you are going to starve to death?

Maybe that's how you feel right now. Maybe you had an encounter with God at one point in your life, but that seems like so long ago now. You still come to church and hear about how God loves you, but you can't tell He's there. Or you know that God is with you, but you're carrying so much pain with you that it has become hard to even be around the crowd. There might even be someone here who hasn't met Jesus yet, but you hope that you can; and you hope that He can relieve you of the burdens that have been weighing on you.

Let me offer you some hope. Jesus cares deeply for you. He knows every struggle and understands all the pain more than anyone else ever could. He understands your hunger and wants to give you the bread of life. He does not want to send you anywhere without first giving you what you need. You see, He is your satisfaction. He has compassion for you.

The more I read this passage, the more I kept coming back to that word: compassion. What does it even mean to have compassion for someone? Broken down to its roots from Latin, compassion means to co-suffer with someone. Passion literally means suffering. That's why the scourging and crucifixion of Jesus is called the passion of Christ. Something that you

are passionate about is something that you are willing to suffer for the sake of it. When Jesus says that He has compassion for the crowd, He means that He suffers with them. It's not just pity or empathy.

He has compassion for you. He suffers with me. All of your pain. All of your burdens. All of your struggles. He endures them. He has compassion for you. You are not alone in your suffering. He bore your sin on the cross, but He also endures your pain with you. He even wants take your burden and give you rest.

> **Matthew 11:28-30**
> 28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

That's another image of compassion or co-suffering. A yoke is used to tie two animals together to share the load of whatever they are pulling. Jesus wants us to bring our burdens to Him and take on His yoke. The only way our burden becomes light is if we are yoked to Christ and He takes all the weight. That's the miracle of salvation. It's nothing that we can ever do, but all on what Christ has done for us.

There is so much in this world that can wear on our souls, but the compassion of God gives our souls rest. The compassion of God restores our hope. The compassion of God leads us through the struggle to the cross. The compassion of God knows we're starving and gives us the bread of life to sustain us. The compassion of God gets us all the way home to Him. The compassion of God became the passion of Christ. He not only co-suffers with us but suffered in our place so that we might have life.

Some of you might think that this is all a bit of a stretch. Does 3 days without food in the middle of nowhere really equate to suffering and pain? I'm just telling you; this is where I'm at right now. I'm preaching from what I'm going through. And I know that some of you are feeling buried even deeper in pain than me.

When we're in a desolate place, we need the compassion of Christ to lead us through it. We need His compassion. We need to lean into being yoked to Him and the hope that He gives us to press on towards His glory. We need to trust His faithfulness in the middle of the desolate place, even if we're at the edge of the crowd and cannot see Him.

That may not make your pain or suffering any easier. But I pray that it gives you hope. Jesus fed the 4,000 after 3 days without food, but He spent 3 days in a tomb so that you can receive living bread right now. And just like the bread and fish gave the crowd enough nourishment to make it to their homes, the living bread of Christ sustains us until we make it home to eternity with Him.

We are sure to face more pain and suffering until the return of Christ. He even said in **John 16:33**, "In the world, you will have tribulation." But that's not the end of the story. "Take heart; I have overcome the world."

The worship team is going to lead us with a beautiful song that Elise shared with us a couple weeks ago that will lead us towards the Lord's table. Let's stand and pray before we sing this together and reflect on the passion of Christ.