“DON’T YOU REMEMBER?”

Mark 7:31–8:26

Key Verses: 8:17,18

“Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: ‘Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don’t you remember?’”

We human beings have an amazing capacity to learn. But sometimes, though we may be exposed to lots of teaching, we’re slow to really *learn* *anything*. It’s kind of disappointing. In today’s passage we see Jesus, probably the greater teacher ever, experiencing some pretty serious frustration with his disciples. What was it he was trying to teach them? And why was it so important for them to learn it? It seems to have a strong lesson for anyone serious about following Jesus. May God open our hearts and speak to us personally through his word today.

Today’s passage is a watershed in Jesus’ ministry. The passage starts and ends with privately healing someone, and in the middle Jesus performs a great public miracle. But in Mark’s Gospel Jesus’ healing and miracles pretty much end here. From now on he mainly focuses on training his disciples. And in this passage, while what he did is amazing, these miracles aren’t just for the people who’re blessed by them; in a sense they’re for his disciples. He’s really trying to reveal something to them.

At the end of last week’s passage we saw Jesus venture out into Gentile territory where he helped a humble mother full of love and full of faith. In today’s passage he continues to minister in Gentile regions. Look at verse 31. Jesus is taking an unusual route. He goes further north first, from Tyre to Sidon, and then turning south and east, passing the Sea of Galilee, where he’d mainly been ministering, he goes back to the region of the Decapolis. It was Gentile territory. Back in chapter 5 Jesus had healed a demon-possessed man there, and the people got so upset with Jesus that they asked him to leave. They were upset because Jesus had sacrificed their pig business to heal that man. Look at verse 32. This time, those same people actually bring somebody to Jesus, someone who was deaf and could hardly talk. And instead of begging Jesus to leave, they beg him to help this man. It’s a pretty remarkable change. Why did they change so much? It was because the formerly demon-possessed man had gone around all through the Decapolis telling people how much Jesus had done for him. His testimony of God’s grace in his life touched, softened and changed people’s hearts. Still today people’s hearts can be opened not by impressive teaching but by people sharing authentically how God’s mercy has brought them healing. It tells us that we all need to remember God’s mercy in our lives, and instead of trying to impress people, we need to share our story humbly and honestly.

What did Jesus do for this deaf and mute man? Look at verse 33. What we first notice here is that Jesus took the man away from the crowd. He didn’t want this to be a public spectacle, to show himself off, but a personal healing. He didn’t treat this man like an object; he treated him with dignity and respect. And we also see that Jesus was personally touching him. He put his fingers into the man’s ears and used his own saliva to touch the man’s tongue. He touched the places where this man had been sick and injured. He did it with compassion. This is how people are healed, when someone loves them enough to personally touch the things in their lives that are crippling or hurting them. It may seem kind of gross, but it’s necessary. This is what love is. What else did Jesus do? Look at verse 34. Jesus looked up to heaven, meaning that he wasn’t depending on himself—he was looking up to God in prayer. He also sighed deeply. Jesus really was a suffering servant who shared in people’s sufferings. His deep sigh came from his frustration at what the devil had done to this man’s life. Mark quotes the Aramaic word Jesus spoke here, which for some reason was a memorable, powerful word. Jesus and most Jews at that time mainly spoke Aramaic in everyday life, and Mark translates this word into Greek for people not familiar with that language. It again tells us that Mark was writing mainly for non-Jewish people in Rome. What’s important here is that Jesus healed not only with his touch and with his own saliva, but also with the power of his word. His love and his word still have the power to heal. What happened? Look at verse 35. It’s an interesting expression here: it says his tongue was “loosened.” Literally Jesus broke the devil’s hold on this man’s life. People today are bound by many things, by problems, fears, worries or sins. Jesus still sets people free.

In verse 36 Jesus goes back to the people who’d brought the man to him, and he speaks to them. He commands them not to talk about this miracle. He doesn’t want people gossiping. But they can’t stop talking. Too much talking is never good. Look at verse 37. This verse is a summary of Jesus’ public ministry. People were talking not just about this healing but about all the things Jesus had done. So they said, “He has done everything well.” Jesus has healed pretty much every kind of disease—leprosy, paralysis, chronic bleeding, demon possession, and now even someone deaf and mute. There was no sickness he *couldn’t* heal. His healings reminded people of what the prophets of the Old Testament had predicted about Messiah's coming. Isaiah 35:5,6a predicted that when the Messiah comes, “Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer and the mute tongue shout for joy.” And when Jesus came, this is what happened.

Now let’s look at 8:1–3. This large crowd had been with Jesus for three days, and now they have nothing to eat. What were they doing for three whole days with Jesus? Jesus had been preaching and teaching. And these people didn’t say, “Could you make it short, Jesus? We’re tired and we’ve got a lot of other things we’d like to do.” Instead, they stayed with him for three whole days and wouldn’t leave; they kept listening, and Jesus kept teaching.

What we also notice here is that the set up is almost exactly the same as what happened earlier when Jesus fed a crowd of 5,000 men. But this time, he’s not so direct with his disciples. Instead, he’s talking to them *indirectly*. Read verses 2,3. He doesn’t really *say* what he wants them to do; he just *implies* it. But what is he expecting? First of all, he’s expecting his disciples to share his compassion for these people. He wants them not to be indifferent, but to care, like he does. How easy it is to be indifferent to the needs of people around us, even to people it would seem we should be caring about. So many people are so into themselves. But Jesus wasn’t like that. He was really *into* these people. He was thinking about *them*. He appreciated how hungry *they* were, even how far many of them had had to *travel* to be with him. Jesus still wants his followers to learn how not to be self-centered but how to really be mindful of others, how to really care about what they’re going through. It’s funny but sometimes we can even be teaching people while not caring about them at all.

Jesus also is expecting his disciples to *do* something. The last time he wanted to feed a large crowd, he encouraged his disciples to go and see what they had and bring it to him. This time, he just *hints* that it’s what they should do. How do they respond? Look at verse 4. They didn’t get it. They weren’t thinking about Jesus and what he could do. They were just thinking about the realities around them—it was a remote place, with very little food supplies. Actually, they’re still just not *willing* to help. Excuses usually disguise an unwilling heart. How does Jesus respond to them? Look at verse 5a. This is exactly the same question he’d asked them the last time: “How many loaves do you have?” Jesus wants us to look not at what we *don’t* have, but at what we *do* have. He wants us to see not what we *can’t* do, but what we *can* do. What we have or what we can do may seem small, but they’re enough for Jesus. We need to offer what we to Jesus by faith, and then he can work a miracle. Jesus is repeating the same lesson to his disciples. Why? Because he really wants them to *learn* it. It’s what they’re really going to need to do if they’re going to follow him after he’s gone. It’s what he’s calling them to do, do the things he’s been doing. Jesus is still calling us to help us not just with our problems but to grow until we can do what he did. Look at verses 6–10. It’s almost exactly the same as the first time he fed a crowd. The key here is in verse 8a. It says, “The people ate and were satisfied.” In Greek this word “satisfied” is the same word the disciples used in verse 4 when they said, “…enough bread to *feed* them.” It tells us that Jesus is the one who can “feed” or “satisfy” all people. Jesus is enough. Miraculously he’s always enough.

Look at verse 11. Jesus had performed so many miracles; he’d just performed another great one, feeding 4,000 people with just seven loaves of bread and a few fish. But the Pharisees come to test him and ask for *another* sign from heaven. How does he respond? Read verse 12. Again, Jesus sighs deeply, this time because he’s so brokenhearted about their unbelief. He refuses to perform a sign on demand for them. He didn’t come to be an entertainer or a genie in a bottle. He didn't let these people sit on his head. It’s a signal that his public miracles are over. Look at verse 13. Jesus left people with such an attitude toward him. Read verses 14,15. The disciples had forgotten to bring bread probably because Jesus had left those people so abruptly. Jesus clearly has something on his mind. He warns his disciples: “Be careful. Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod.” What is this “yeast”? It’s their looking for miracles again and again. They needed miracles to bolster their faith. Without miracles, they couldn’t believe. This was the Jews’ problem down through history. When Moses performed miracles, they believed; when they had to suffer a little bit, they became full of complaints and stopped believing. Jesus warned his disciples that this was like yeast, meaning it may seem small, but it’s very influential. He also meant that like yeast, such an attitude puffs people up with pride. How proud it is for people to test God by demanding miracles from him! How easy it is to get puffed up over virtually nothing! But why did Jesus warn his disciples about this? He could sense that even *they* were becoming like this. They weren’t *learning* from his miracles. They weren’t *understanding* what they revealed about him. They weren’t thinking about what they learned about *Jesus* through the miracles; they were just thinking about the *miracles* themselves.

How did the disciples respond? Look at verse 16. They couldn’t think past the problem that they had no bread. Because of this problem they couldn’t understand what Jesus was saying. They were interpreting Jesus’ words through the lens of their own problem. From the crowds this could be expected; but these men were following Jesus as his disciples. What did he say to them? Read verses 17,18. Jesus rebukes them. Jesus is usually so patient and gracious. But this time he rebukes his disciples for not learning or understanding. And he asks, "Really? Still?" Back in chapter 4 he told them, “The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that, ‘they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding...’” (4:11,12; cf. Isa6:9,10). But now, though they were witnessing what Jesus did and hearing what he said, even the disciples were not perceiving or understanding the spiritual meaning. Jesus asks them, “Don’t you remember?” What did he want them to remember? Read verses 19–21. He wanted them to remember both feedings of crowds. Specifically, he wanted them to remember what they experienced afterwards. When Jesus fed the 5,000, the disciples had picked up twelve basketfuls of leftovers, and when he fed the 4,000, they had picked up seven. They had picked up those leftovers with their own hands, and it was amazing! All those hungry men in the crowd ate until they were satisfied, and there were *still leftovers*! What should the disciples have understood and remembered? They should understand and remember that Jesus is the one who can meet every need. Jesus is the one who can completely satisfy us. With Jesus, we have nothing to worry about. This is faith. But without bread in the boat the disciples were again worried. They were not applying the spiritual lessons they learned in the past to real life situations they were encountering now. We do the same thing. Our problems make us blind. Even Jesus was struggling to help his disciples open their spiritual eyes. How can we open our spiritual eyes? Our eyes are opened as we remember what God has done, and what he can still do. Our eyes are opened as we remember and understand Jesus. Our eyes become blinded when we’re more interested in something other than him, whether it’s popularity, food, money or a relationship.

At the end of today’s passage we see another healing. And again Jesus makes it a private encounter, not a show to impress people. But this healing is very unusual. Usually Jesus could heal any disease immediately. This time, it takes two tries. It doesn’t mean Jesus was lacking, or that the man was lacking faith. In a sense it’s a metaphor for what Jesus is trying to do with his disciples. Their spiritual eyes are not fully opening. They can’t really see clearly. Just as he has to repeatedly put his hands on this blind man, Jesus repeatedly has to touch his disciples. It tells us that for our spiritual eyes to be opened takes time and repetition; Jesus has to repeatedly touch us. If we stay away from him, avoid him or leave too early, it won’t happen.

Let’s read 8:17,18 again. Today Jesus is asking each of us, “Don’t you remember?” May God help us remember what Jesus has done for us. May he help us remember that Jesus is always enough. May he help us apply our faith to our real life problems. And when we open our eyes, may he help us learn Jesus’ compassion for people and do what he did.