READ Mark 6:35-44

KIDS What are the two feasts in Mark 6?

One thing that has increasingly been on the mind of everyone who lives near Nashville over the last couple of years is traffic. Routes, “Leave by” times, wrecks, and with the recent mudslide, lane closures. It’s been a headache for many I’m sure. Some of it its made better by technology. With a free app on our smartphone, some forethought, leaving earlier and some creative backroad winding it’s USUALLY been possible to miss the worst of it.

Just as short as 15 years ago, there was no such thing as WAZE and Google Maps. Even printed Mapquest directions was really in its infancy. I can remember before a long trip, going with my grandparents and parents to AAA where they would help you highlight the best route, sights and deals for your travel. You could follow it mile marker by mile marker, flipping down the next section of the map.
But today, Road Atlases and even morning traffic reports on the news are as outdated as yesterday's newspaper by the time you grab your keys to walk out the door in the morning.

When we were still very new to the area some years ago, I can vividly remember having trouble remembering one particular route home from the airport. It seemed like every time I guessed I took the wrong exit. **Looking back on it now, its pretty embarrassing to say it was Briley. I would always end up taking Briley south and immediately remember I needed to go north instead.**

That kind of directional change isn’t too difficult. You have about a dozen exits that you could take in order to correct the change, but every time I come to it today I remember the real fast deliberation and sweaty palms of “Which exit is it?”

That fork in the road pales in comparison to the one that is staked right dead in the middle of Mark chapter 6. This long chapter that holds a collection of some of our favorite stories of Christ and His earthly ministry has an account of two feasts sandwiched into verses 14-44. The first feast is marked by lust and excess. The second one is a celebration of faith and miraculous, Divine power. The first produced the grotesque death of the greatest man to have ever been born by woman. The second yielded life to thousands of needy souls.

Let's take a look at that first feast within the walls of one of Herod's palaces in Machaerus and see the spiritual famine in his household.

Mark 6:14 tells takes us to a flashback (a backstory of sorts) that is going on in the mind of Herod the Tetrarch. Jesus’s ministry was growing
so rapidly and His name was being spoken so often that reports of His miraculous feats had reached the ears of one of the governors set up by Rome to rule the area. While most were elated to hear of Jesus’s healing power, Herod the Tetrarch was mortified because he was convinced that Jesus was actually John the Baptist risen from the dead. That’s scary enough, but it was worse for Herod because he was the one who had John beheaded.

All of this speaks to Herod’s guilty conscience for killing a good man, and picking up in 6:17, the story unfolds of how he killed John the Baptist.

17 For Herod himself had sent and laid hold of John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife; for he had married her.
18 Because John had said to Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.”
19 Therefore Herodias held it against him and wanted to kill him, but she could not;
20 for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just and holy man, and he protected him. And when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly.

Herod the Tetrarch was a wicked governor, but the apple didn’t fall far from the tree. His father (Herod the Great) while touted as one of Rome’s greatest provincial governors in their history will be remembered by Christians as the ruler who massacred hundreds of infant boys in a desperate grasp at trying to kill the Baby Jesus in Matthew 2. Before his death, he petitioned Rome to allow his province of rule to be split among
four of his sons. Rome complied and thus Herod the Tetrarch (literally, ruler of a fourth) came to power.

While this Herod did not order the mass genocide of infants, he followed in his father's footsteps in amassing a series of wives, the next more vile than the former until he ends up with the worst of the worst and the one who would ultimately get him exiled from Roman lands, Herodias. Herodias was his brother Philip's wife, and as you can imagine, this shattered what little family harmony this dysfunctional group had into pieces. Ultimately, Philip would amass an army, march on Herod's land, be moments away from conquering him when the Roman army is dispatched to quell the uprising.

Herodias loves every second of the drama in this her personal soap opera, until some backwoods, wild-eyed, leather and camel hair wearing preacher named John the Baptist begins to make her points 1 through 3 in his sermons about how spiritually corrupt Israel was. Repentance was his message, and he pointed his finger right at Herod's broken household. Herodias sunk her claws so deep into Herod that he ultimately gave in and had John the Baptist arrested even though he feared and respected him greatly.

She wanted him dead but silenced and in prison would do; until finally, one day, the opportunity presented itself to be rid of the man altogether.

21 Then an opportune day came when Herod on his birthday gave a feast for his nobles, the high officers, and the chief men of Galilee.
22 And when Herodias' daughter herself came in and danced, and pleased Herod and those who sat with him, the king said to the girl, “Ask me whatever you want, and I will give it to you.”

23 He also swore to her, “Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half my kingdom.”

I don’t even think I would go into too much detail even if we didn’t have kids amongst us this morning because what is going on in this account is really too obscene to even talk about. Suffice it to say that Herod is drunk from alcohol, drunk on lust and drunk on himself so when his stepdaughter/niece finishes her dance he slurs into a self-aggrandizing speech about “Whatever you ask, I will give you, up to half my kingdom.” This dummy doesn’t have a kingdom. He’s a two-bit fourth part owner in a governorship that his daddy bought him. Were she to ask for half of his “kingdom” she wouldn’t get much, but that’s not why her mother put her on stage at the club that night.

24 So she went out and said to her mother, “What shall I ask?”

And she said, “The head of John the Baptist!”

25 Immediately she came in with haste to the king and asked, saying, “I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.”

26 And the king was exceedingly sorry; yet, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he did not want to refuse her.

For Herod, it was all about keeping up appearances. He locks away John to hush him up so he could look more righteous. He throws himself
this ridiculous birthday party so he could look more powerful. He has a
good man killed, not because he thought John earned capital punishment
or even because he had finally given into Herodias’s nagging but
“because of his oaths and because of those who sat with him” he had to
keep looking good for the mob.

So John the Baptist, the greatest man to ever be born (Matthew
11:11), the man “Great before the Lord” (Luke 1:15), the prophet foretold
millennia before by Moses (Deut. 18:15) Malachi and Isaiah is senselessly
murdered. He is sacrificed on an altar of Herod’s ego, and his head is
offered up to the false prophet of the gods of lust and revenge, Herodias.

That’s the first feast. Sin and debauchery are celebrated. Nothing is
too low class. Nothing is off limits. Its a “what happens here stays here”
kind of empty promise that has you waking up the next morning and to
your horror realizing that your foolishness of that night will actually haunt
you the rest of your life. Don’t take that fork in the road. It promises
opulence and namesake and fun and fulfillment. Its labeled “Feast” but it
only produces famine and death.

The other direction at this fork in the road stands in stark contrast to
Herod’s luxurious banqueting hall. In the following verses of Mark 6, we
find Jesus and His apostles tired and ragged coming off of an intense,
short-term mission trip where Jesus—for the first time—had unleashed His
disciples to preach, teach and practice miracles by themselves in His
name. The disciples are dog tired but giddy to tell Jesus about all of the
amazing things that happened as they were sent out.
If you’ve ever seen some of our mission groups get back from a short-term mission trip, I think you might understand where they are in Mark 6:30. They are tired, but they have an invigorated spiritual life where they just experienced God in a brand new way, and they want everyone to hear about it. But Jesus, in His wisdom, counsels them to spend a little time resting; so they set sail on the Sea of Galilee for a short staycation.

But this is going to turn out to be the ultimate “pack the whole family up and drive several hours to a lake house for some much needed R&R when pulling up in the driveway, your phone pings with an email from your boss saying he needs that report right away” kind of vacation because…

Mark 6:33 But the multitudes saw them departing, and many knew Him and ran there on foot from all the cities. They arrived before them and came together to Him.

This short voyage in the boat would have taken Jesus and the disciples about 4 hours to complete, but the multitude on land would have to cover a little over 9 miles to get to their location. Do the math. For the mob of people to beat them to their destination, they had to be traveling a lot faster than most of us hike.

They are eager to hear Jesus. The crowd picks up in number as they pass through village after village along the coast. Each village asks a traveler where they are going in such a hurry and when they hear that they are meeting Jesus, they stop their work, drop everything, forget about packing any food for their day hike, and go. The multitude grows and grows until it is reported that 5,000 men are there. The language in the
Greek is so specific that it suggests that this excludes the number of women and children.

I can just feel the disciples’ hearts sink when the shore begins appearing bit by bit and see that it is teeming with thousands of people all wanting to hear Jesus. I can hear their moans and pleas for just a day off, just a 24 hour rest from ministry. But not Jesus…

34 And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things.

Jesus is moved with compassion. Literally, He feels an aching in His gut at the scene before Him. These are His people, the ones He created for His glory, the ones He had set apart as a peculiar people, the ones to whom He had given all of the law and prophets, but here they were, wandering, begging, hurting for just a touch from a real spiritual Guide. They were sheep without a shepherd which meant they were defenseless and starving not knowing which way led to green pastures. So the Good Shepherd shook off His exhaustion and began teaching them. If we were describing any other teacher, we might say that He got lost in His teachings because eventually the sun begins setting.

The disciples are still pretty ticked that their vacation got ruined so…

35 When the day was now far spent, His disciples came to Him and said, “This is a deserted place, and already the hour is late. 36 Send them away, that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy themselves bread; for they have nothing to eat.”
37 But He answered and said to them, “You give them something to eat.”

And they said to Him, “Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give them something to eat?”

Can’t you hear their frustration? Don’t get on your high and mighty spiritual throne. We would have cocked the same “hangry” attitude. Other Gospel accounts relay that Philip was the one that Jesus asked to feed them. He responds with, “Sure…I’ll give up 8 months worth of wages just so everyone can have a little snack…NOT!”

But still, Jesus’s words ring true, “You give them something to eat.” You see the need. You know the Resource. You feed them. I think Jesus might have been knocking them down a notch since they had just been hours before talking about all of the miracles they had done on their short-term mission trip.

38 But He said to them, “How many loaves do you have? Go and see.” And when they found out they said, “Five, and two fish.”

We know from the three other Gospels that Andrew brings a little boy whose mother undoubtedly had packed him this little lunch of five barley pancakes and two pickled sardines. Even Andrew is touched with the incredibility of the situation, “What is this snack compared to so many?” Jesus doesn’t even answer that question.

39 Then He commanded them to make them all sit down in groups on the green grass.

The Good Shepherd has taught them and protected them from the spiritual wolves that would devour them, but now, He makes them to lie
down in green pastures, and He is going to prepare a table before them the likes of which nothing could ever be compared to.

41 And when He had taken the five loaves and the two fish, He looked up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to His disciples to set before them; and the two fish He divided among them all.

42 So they all ate and were filled.
43 And they took up twelve baskets full of fragments and of the fish.
44 Now those who had eaten the loaves were about five thousand men.

I do not know what it looked like exactly. I do not know if He did it in plain sight or behind a rock. I do not know if with every break, new bread grew out or if He multiplied it all with one blessing. I don’t really even know where He got the baskets, or why He took up the leftovers (if not to just kind of say, “Told you so” to the 12 disciples). There is simply no explanation about how all of this went down, but this we do know. They all ate, and they were all filled.

The first feast ended up looking more like a famine. The second started at first like a famine “This is a deserted place. It’s late, and the people are hungry,” but it ended with a feast; everyone filled.

At least they were filled for the rest of the day. John’s account in John 6 recalls that the very next day a huge multitude of people gathers around Jesus, probably many of the same that we were introduced to
today. They came to Him because they were hungry, but Jesus saw it as a prime opportunity to preach.

**John 6:26** Jesus answered them and said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.”

34 Then they said to Him, “Lord, give us this bread always.”

35 And Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.”

Herod and Herodias woke up starving the next morning from their binge-full feast. Their pride was all empty nothingness that would exile them from Rome and ultimately from the presence of God. You stand at a similar fork in the road this morning. You’ve lived for yourself, followed your heart, stuffed your face full of what this world has to offer, but now the Bread of Life, Christ Himself, stands pleading with you to take Him, follow Him, indulge Him, and He will turn your famine—your desert-like existence—into life and life abundantly.

Take that road. Fill up on Christ so that this world has no square millimeter of your life. Choose the forever feast and allow Him to lead you.

One final verse from John 6 where Jesus concludes His Bread of Life sermon:

**John 6:40** And this is the will of [the Father] who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.”

You have seen Jesus in the Gospel accounts this morning. Will you believe Him?