

A Storytelling Commentary on Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

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This story is complex in its connections with other stories. First of all it is a commentary on the mission of the twelve and then on the death of John the Baptist. It is also the introduction to the feeding of the 5000 and Jesus walking on the water and it concludes with the healings in Gennesaret. Overall, the spirit of this story as edited by the editors of the lectionary is one of high enthusiasm and of the energy of Jesus for people who are in need.

It is important to identify connections with the other stories because they determine the spirit of what is being told. The first sentence describing the disciples coming back and reporting all that they had done and taught is full of their enthusiasm about the success of their first missionary journey. It has that spirit of young men who are full of energy about what they have accomplished.

Jesus' response can be told appropriately as a response to the death of John the Baptist. So while the disciples are wildly enthusiastic, Jesus is very sober because he recognizes the reality of what is ahead for him. He proposes that they have a retreat and that they go off by themselves for a while.

As they go, the people recognize them and like a group of kids running to the park, they all run to the place where he is going. The picture of this that would have been known to those who heard the story is that Jesus and the disciples were going across a corner of the Sea of Galilee from the area that was settled around Capernaum on the western shore to where there was an uninhabited wilderness area on the northern shore. What is implied in the story is that the people recognized where Jesus was going and ran to get there ahead of him, so that when he came on shore there was a huge crowd. Obviously, this blew Jesus' retreat idea and you may want to indicate that in your report of what Jesus found when he arrived.

The second part of the story is the summary of what has happened throughout all of the healings in these chapters of Mark. It follows the stories of the feeding of the 5000 and Jesus walking on the water. It is a brief summary of the wild enthusiasm of people in the region of Gennesaret, which is also in that same corner of the Sea of Galilee. Specifically, it is on the west bank of the Sea of Galilee somewhat south of Capernaum.

The story is one of people bringing all their sick to Jesus and laying them out in the marketplaces. Just as the woman who had had a flow of blood for twelve years touched his garment and was made well, so also all the people who touch his garment in the villages and towns are made well. This reflects the traditions of the divine men of antiquity, of the great healers. The power of the divine is present even in Jesus' garment.

He doesn't have to do anything other than simply walk by and his power to heal is present.

The overall impact of the story is of delight and sheer enthusiasm about the energy of the Holy Spirit that is present in Jesus' very being. My suggestion would be that you tell this story with that kind of enthusiasm and energy and life. This is one of the climactic sections of the Gospel of Mark in relation to Jesus' miraculous deeds.