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The Revised Common Lectionary Notes

July 1, 8, 15, 22, 29, and August 5

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July 1, The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost: Mark 5:21–43

Mark 5:1–20 speaks of Jesus exorcizing a Gentile in the region of the Decapolis—to the southeast of the Sea of Galilee.

5:21 refers to Jesus returning to the west side of the Sea of Galilee—*possibly* to the region of Capernaum. After He arrives there, a great crowd gathers around Him on the seashore.

5:22–24: Jairus, a leader of a local Jewish synagogue, comes to Jesus, falls on his knees, and begs Him to come to his home as quickly as possible. His 12-year-old daughter is dying! Jairus refers to his “little daughter,” and seeks a cure—not resuscitation from death. Although the daughter is not yet dead, she is at the brink of death—but there is still hope that she can be healed. Jesus accedes to Jairus’ request and sets out for his home.

5:25–34: At this point, there is a break in the Jairus narrative. The crowds that gather around Jesus along the way set the stage for a miracle within a miracle. By inserting the narrative of the hemorrhaging woman into that of Jairus’ daughter, Mark dramatizes a sense of tension and focuses on the miracle of the resurrection.

A woman creeps up to Jesus, and secretly (so she hopes) touches His cloak. The woman has been suffering from a menstrual disorder for 12 years—a condition that makes her miserable in health and an unclean outcast among her family and community. Her hope is that if she can but touch Jesus’ cloak, she will be healed. She touches Jesus’ cloak—and is immediately healed! Jesus, sensing (better, “knowing”) what has taken place, asks, “Who touched My garments?” Of course, Jesus knows who touched Him, but He forces the woman to “confess” that she is the one who touched Him—which she does fearfully, expecting Jesus (and others in the surrounding crowd) to rebuke her in no uncertain terms. Jesus does not rebuke her. He addresses her as “Daughter,” commends her for her faith, and bids her to go in peace! In relating to the woman in this manner, Jesus once again does away with concern for laws having to do with ritual purity; see Leviticus 15:25–30, but note also the contents of 25:19–24 and 31–33.

5:35–43: After Jesus heals the woman with the menstrual disorder, He is told that Jairus’ daughter has died. Nonetheless, Jesus goes to Jairus’ house, taking with Him Peter, James, and John. After arriving at the house, He goes into the room where the dead girl lies—taking with Him the three disciples, Jairus, and his wife. He then takes the (ritually unclean!) dead girl by the hand and commands her to return to life. Those who witness her restoration to life are amazed! Jesus then commands them not to tell others what He has done and asks them to give the girl some food.

It is intriguing to note that the woman had been hemorrhaging for *twelve* years, and that Jairus’ daughter was *twelve* years of age. (Is there a hint of a reference to “the 12 tribes of Israel” being restored to wholeness?) Jesus’ actions in Mark 5 become more profound and radical when we understand that, according to the Jewish religious elite, two of the worst things a person could do were to touch a dead body, or to touch a menstruating woman. Those who touched such people were required to undergo expensive and time-consuming rituals—and resume normal life on the following day. However, other people do not *infect* Jesus with their uncleanness; He *infects* (“heals”) them with His divine wholeness.

July 8, The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost: Mark 6:1–13

Prior to pondering the insights offered in relation to the Gospel pericopes for the coming Sundays, ponder the quote offered below (*Living the Story* by R. Paul Stevens and Michael Green; pp. 134–135):

Most early Communion did not take place in a church at all, but in a home. People began to appear in the early evening with materials for a potluck supper. They are happy and relaxed; work is over. All are on a level here, men and women. Roman citizens and commoners, slaves and free. Oil lamps are lit. Couches are set. Feet are washed. They have a meal, reclining around a courtyard, or squashed into a room. They share news. Someone produces a musical instrument and they begin to sing. Indeed, they create new songs, snatches of which are to be found in the New Testament, like “Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead: Christ shall give you life,” or “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty, who was and is and is to come.” Meanwhile, someone has brought out the church box that contains their most Christian belongings: some sayings of Jesus, perhaps a letter from an apostle, or communion vessels. Praise is heartfelt. Speaking in tongues might well follow. There could be a prayer for a healing or a specific need of one of the members. Certainly prayer, the reading of an Old Testament scripture, the recitation of a story about Jesus, and some words of encouragement from members of the community, along with joyful singing, would all feature. And as the evening comes to an end, they would tell again the story of Jesus’ passion, and break bread and drink wine in remembrance of Him. Every scrap is finished. The prayer that Jesus taught them is recited. They move around and embrace one another with a holy kiss, and then go home. All very simple. No service books. No priests. No altars. Every eye is on the unseen Lord, the bread, the wine, and each other. And then—out into the night, spiritually refueled for the journey of the coming week.

Indeed, food for thought. We might well ask, “Why have things changed so much during the past 2,000 years? What must we do to get God’s people a little more back on track?”

Vv. 1–2: “That place” most likely refers to Capernaum. His “hometown” is Nazareth; see Matthew 13:54 and Luke 4:16. As we might expect, Jesus’ disciples accompany Him. The events that follow are parallel

to those described in Matthew 13:53–58 and Luke 4:16–30.

In the Matthew and Mark narratives, Jesus' hearers respond to His teaching with sarcasm and ridicule. Some read into Luke 4:16–30 a suggestion that the initial reaction of Jesus' audience is approval. However, scholars suggest that Luke's Greek text actually refers to a very negative reaction on the part of Jesus' hearers. The word commonly translated as *amazed* would be more accurately rendered as *astonished*, or, better still, *appalled*. After all, eventually Jesus' hearers plot to throw Him off a cliff! Note also John 7:5, "For not even His brothers believed in Him."

The things that shock Jesus' hearers are "all this," His knowledge and authority, His wisdom, and His deeds of power. Where *did* Jesus get all these things?

V. 3: The disparagement increases, and Jesus' hearers take offense at Him. "How is it possible that One with links to Nazareth is achieving such prominence?"

V. 4: Jesus admits that He is a prophet—a title that will be ascribed to Him rather frequently. In this verse, Jesus is referred to as "the carpenter" and "the son of Mary." (Matthew 13:55 refers to Jesus as "the carpenter's son.") Reference is also made to the names of four of Jesus' brothers, and to the presence of His sisters (who are not named).

Vv. 5–6: Jesus responds to the negative attitude and unbelief prevailing in Nazareth by performing no deeds of power; He merely lays His hands on a few sick people and heals them.

V. 6b: Jesus now leaves Nazareth and visits other villages in the region where He teaches. It is helpful to bear in mind that Jewish leaders referred to Galilee as "Galilee of the Gentiles." Nazareth was a first-century version of present-day Jewish settlements in the West Bank region. The hope was that the Jews might eventually force the Gentiles to move out of Galilee so that the region might become exclusively Jewish. Little wonder, then, that when in Luke's narrative Jesus reminds His Jewish hearers of the compassion that Elijah and Elisha showed toward Gentiles, they are furious!

V. 7: Jesus now sends His disciples out, two by two. He does not instruct them to teach but gives them divine authority to cast out demons.

Vv. 8–9: The parallel passages in Matthew 10:5–15 and Luke 9:1–6 forbid the disciples to take with them staff or sandals. In Mark, Jesus allows them to take both, but only one tunic. However, the emphasis on living very simply is clear: no bread, no bag, no money in their belts. The ideal of chosen poverty would have been new to the Jews, although the concept of a wandering mendicant philosopher who had no possessions was a familiar figure in the Greek world.

V. 10: Jesus' guidelines concerning hospitality find mention in early documents that refer to itinerant evangelists; see the *Didache* 11:4f.

V. 11: The disciples are to witness to the faithless in a symbolic Jewish manner: they are to empty their shoes or sandals of dust when re-entering the Holy Land from Gentile territory.

Vv. 12–13: Although v. 7 refers to Jesus giving the disciples authority over unclean spirits, it also proclaims the need to repent. No doubt, exorcisms and healings authenticate the disciples' ministry.

In the parallel accounts, and in Luke's missionary charge to the 70 disciples, they are to preach about the Kingdom of God that broke in with Jesus' ministry; see Matthew 10:7; Luke 9:2. They will not have gone through all the towns of Israel "before the Son of Man comes"—a statement that stresses the urgency of the disciples' mandate (Matthew 10:23).

Worth noting is the fact that when the disciples return from their mission, they return as "apostles" or "those sent" (6:30). Their missionary journey was to initiate them into the nature of apostleship.

July 15, The Eighth Sunday after Pentecost: Mark 6:14–29

This narrative serves as a transition between Jesus' popular healing ministry in Galilee and a narrative section in which He is active either on the other side of the Sea of Galilee or in the Phoenician cities of Tyre or Sidon on the Mediterranean coast (6:31–8:26, with the exception of 7:1–23 where He carries out a teaching ministry that is "placeless").

6:14: The hostility of Herod Antipas to one whose highest boast was that he was preparing the way for another may explain why Jesus kept out of Herod's territory (7:24; 8:27; 9:29). Herod is not a king but, since the death of his father (Herod the Great in 4 BC), a tetrarch (literally, "ruler of a fourth [part]"). Herod, to whom religion and faith apparently meant nothing, is nonetheless superstitious enough to fear that, in Jesus, John the Baptist has returned from the dead. The "name" of Jesus implies word of His person and His power.

6:15: Several popular beliefs about Jesus are recorded, one of which is that Jesus is Elijah returned to earth (see Malachi 3:1; 4:5—verses with links to the mysterious account of Elijah's disappearance, 2 Kings 2:11). Others are saying that Jesus is a new prophet like the ones of old; see Deuteronomy 18:15.

6:16: Herod expresses his belief that Jesus is John the Baptist (whom he had beheaded) returned to life.

6:17: What follows in 6:17–29 serves as a "flashback"—the only use of this technique in the four Gospels.

According to Josephus (*Antiquities* 18.5.2 119), John was imprisoned and beheaded in the fortress Machaerus on the northeast corner of the Dead Sea. Herod Antipas had stolen his half-brother's wife (who was also his niece). When his true wife (the daughter of King Aretas of Nabatea in "Arabia") heard of her rejection, she fled to her family home. Herodias was the daughter of Aristobolus, a son of Herod the Great and his second wife Mariamne I. She had been the wife of a certain Herod whom Mark refers to as Philip, son of a third wife of Herod the Great (also named Mariamne). When Herodias saw that her worldly prospects in Rome (where her first husband lived) were nil, she successfully manipulated things so that she might marry her brother-in-law Herod Antipas—the Herod of this incident. Herod Antipas was a son of Herod the Great and his fourth wife, Malthace. Herod Antipas' brother, Archelaus, ruled Judea and Samaria from 4 BC until AD 6, when he was banished by the Romans to the area of Lyons (in modern France).

Herodias' daughter (tradition names her Salome) was most likely the daughter of Herod Philip and Herodias; she could have been 12 to 20 years old. She eventually married her uncle, also named Herod Philip, who ruled various regions to the northeast of the Sea of Galilee. He was a son of Herod the Great

and his fifth wife, Cleopatra, and died in AD 34.

Vv. 18–19: John the Baptist's charge of incest in the royal lineage is revealed, as is also Herodias' plot to destroy him. Her scheming reflects that of Jezebel seeking to have Elijah put to death; see 1 Kings 19:2. Initially, she cannot get her way because Herod Antipas is in awe of John the Baptist—superstitiously, perhaps. John might have been confined to prison to preserve him from Herodias' schemes.

V. 20: Herod Antipas is of two minds: lustful and weak yet attracted to the strength and integrity of John. He likes to listen to what John said and taught. Matthew, more outspoken than Mark, says Herod does not destroy John for fear of the people (14:5).

V. 21: The birthday celebration could well have been held in the fortress, which was not all dungeons. The summoning by despots of whole courts to inaccessible country places was (and still is!) widely practiced. (Today the terms would be "VIPs," "the top brass," and "friends of the administration.")

V. 22: That the girl's dance would have pleased the men suggests a flouting of the customs of the day.

V. 23–24: Herod's words to the girl reflect those that King Ahasuerus addressed to Esther; the rash promise is similar to, but not as extravagant as, that which the Persian king makes (Esther 5:2; 7:2). The daughter seems innocent of the intrigue, but the mother's prompt response points to a plot well in place!

V. 25: The girl's return to Herod's presence and insistent tone suggest the mind of a strong-willed child who plans to keep up the advantage that she knows she has rather than any special cruelty on her part.

V. 26: Herod's deep disappointment at her answer is consistent with his earlier willingness to hear John. Most likely, his guests influenced his answer more than his oath. It is also possible that the power of strong drink influenced him.

V. 27: Herod acts immediately. It seems that the dungeon in which John was held is close by, and John's head soon makes its appearance.

V. 28: The soldier who carried out the execution hands John's head to Herodias' daughter on a platter—and she in turn hands it to her mother.

V. 29: There is enough decency left in Antipas (as later in Pilate) to give John's body to his friends, who bury it in a tomb.

July 22, The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost: Mark 6:30–34, 53–56

V. 30: This transitional verse reports the followup on the mission of the Twelve, here called "the apostles" for the only time in Mark. Mark usually calls them "the Twelve," or "the disciples" (but he has just used the latter term in v. 29 in reference to John's followers). Mark's report on their activities is no more specific than that on the instructions Jesus gives them concerning the content of their preaching. The use of the word *taught* to describe the activities of anyone but Jesus is unique in the Gospels. The disciples usually preach. If the disciples had attempted to proclaim Jesus' teachings, it is unlikely that

their efforts would have born much fruit, for Mark states throughout his writing that the disciples themselves did not really understand Jesus' message.

V. 31: Matthew describes Jesus' call to the disciples to go with Him to a place away from the crowds as a result of His learning of John the Baptist's death. Not so in Mark, where the decision to travel is based on an invitation to enjoy some nourishment and rest.

V. 32: The precise destination is not stated; perhaps it was the secluded northeast corner of the Sea of Galilee. It would have been inconvenient and difficult for the crowds to cross the bars of silt near the mouth of the River Jordan at certain times of the year.

V. 33: However, the crowds observe what is taking place, hurry overland, and interrupt the hopes of Jesus and the disciples to enjoy some peace and quiet.

V. 34: This verse is transitional. It can point back to the crowd's pursuit of Jesus, or ahead to the compassionate deed that will conclude Jesus' day of teaching. Jesus feeds His flock with His words, as Moses instructed Joshua to do (Number 27:17).

The feeding of the 5,000 follows (6:35–44). Those whom Jesus feeds are Jews, and the 12 baskets of leftovers most likely point to Jesus' compassion for the twelve tribes of His people. Some suggest that it may also contain a hint that the 12 disciples will become apostles).

After feeding the 5,000, Jesus tells His disciples to move on to Bethsaida, and He himself dismisses the crowds and goes up a mountain to pray (6:45–46). When evening comes, Jesus walks across the stormy surface of the Sea of Galilee to join His disciples (6:47–52). When Jesus climbs aboard the boat, the gale dies away (v. 51).

V. 53: The disciples, deflected from their course, put in either south of Capernaum on a plain that Josephus identifies or else at a village called Gennesaret.

Vv. 54–55: When the group disembarks from the boat, the people there immediately recognize Jesus. They rush around in the nearby region and bring the sick on mats to Jesus so that He might heal them.

V. 56: Wherever Jesus goes (into villages, cities, or farms), people lie sick in the market places and beg Jesus to let them touch the fringes (tassels) of His cloak—and those who do so are healed.

The tassels of Jesus' cloak are mentioned for the first time in Mark. The tassels are the four fringes on the outer cloak required by Numbers 15:38f and Deuteronomy 22:12. Jesus wore them as an observant Jew, but expressed scorn concerning the elongated tassels worn by the Pharisees to draw attention to themselves (Matthew 23:5).

July 29, The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost: John 6:1–21

In John 5, we read of Jesus healing a crippled man on a Sabbath day in the vicinity of the Pool of Bethzatha in *Jerusalem*. The events described in ch. 6 take place on the *east bank of the Sea of Galilee*—also called *the Sea of Tiberias*. (John makes no reference to Jesus' return journey from Jerusalem to

Galilee.) *Tiberias* was the name of a city located on the southwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. It was founded by Herod Antipas about AD 20 in honor of Tiberias Caesar.

The passage under review describes Jesus feeding about 5,000 men (and an unknown number of women and children) with bread and fish. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus feeds 5,000 Jewish men with bread and fish in the region to the west of the Sea of Galilee, and 4,000 Gentiles in the Decapolis to the southeast of the Sea of Galilee; see Mark 6:30–44; 8:1-10.

In Matthew 14:13–21, Jesus feeds 5,000 Jewish men (plus women and children); in 15:32–39, He feeds 4,000 (apparently Gentile) men, plus women and children. In both Mark and Matthew, there are 12 baskets of leftovers after the first feeding and seven baskets of leftovers after the second feeding. (Here note Deuteronomy 7:1ff and its references to *seven* Gentile nations that the Israelites are to hate and destroy.)

In Luke's Gospel (9:10–17), Jesus feeds 5,000 Jewish men in the vicinity of Bethsaida, located on the northeast shore of the Sea of Galilee—and there are 12 baskets of leftovers.

The sequence of events in John resembles closely that in Mark (without Mark's second multiplication):

Feeding of the 5,000	John	6:1–15	Mark	6:30–44
Walking on the sea		6:16–24		6:45–54
Request for a sign		6:25–34		8:11–13
Discourse on bread		6:35–60		8:14–21
Faith of Peter		6:61–70		8:27–30
Passion theme and denial		6:71–72		8:31–33

What follows has been included in earlier pericope studies. We include it again in light of the fact that Jesus repeatedly did things that were not in keeping with the Jewish hopes of His day. Some believed that when the Messianic Age broke in, God would host a great banquet. The following passages deal with who will participate in that banquet. Note carefully the references to those who supposedly would never take part in the Messianic Banquet, and then give thought to those to whom Jesus showed mercy.

YHWH (*Yahweh*) of hosts will make for all the peoples in this mountain a meal. And although they supposed it to be an honor, it will be a shame for them and great plagues—plagues from which they will be unable to escape, plagues whereby they will come to their end. So these terrible things are going to come upon the Gentiles. (Paraphrased from the Aramaic *Targum*)

A Jewish writing that was written in the period between the Testaments reflects the thinking of the time. It also provides a picture of the great banquet in which the Gentiles will be included. But the angel of death will be present. And this angel will use his sword to destroy those Gentiles! The place will run with blood, and the believers will wade through this blood and then sit down with the messiah! (*Book of Enoch 62:1–11*)

The Qumran community (Essenes), where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found, believed that no Gentiles and no Samaritans would be present at this banquet. And only the Jews who kept the law in the very precise, narrow fashion that these Essenes prescribed would eat at this table. Furthermore, no one with

any physical imperfection or impediment would be welcome. The text reads:

Then the Messiah of Israel shall come and the chiefs of the clan of Israel shall sit before him, each in the order of his dignity, according to his place in their camp and marches And no one is going to be allowed in who is smitten in his flesh, or paralyzed in his feet or hands, or lame, or blind, or deaf, or dumb, or smitten in his flesh with a visible blemish. (*Messianic Rule, 1QSA, 2:11–22*, tr. G. Vermes)

John 6:1–9: In John, there is no teaching before the multiplication of the loaves. Jesus is seated on a mountain (reminiscent of Mt. Sinai?), and while waiting for the people, brings up the question of providing food for them Himself. The introduction of Philip and Andrew as characters in the scene is typical of John. Only John mentions a young boy (or “servant”) and *barley* loaves (a detail that reflects Elisha’s miracle; see 2 Kings 4:42–44).

6:10–11: The story of the multiplication contains details designed to remind readers of Jesus’ Holy Supper. (Here note also 6:51–59). John alone uses the verb “to give thanks” (*eucharisteo*). John alone has *Jesus Himself* distribute the bread and fish.

6:12–13: Jesus has *the disciples* gather the 12 baskets of leftovers.

6:14–15: In Mark, Jesus has the disciples leave immediately after the feeding. In v. 14, some of those present state that Jesus must be the “new Moses” for whom they had been waiting (Deuteronomy 18:15). In 6:15, John tells us that Jesus withdrew from the region because the people wanted to make Him their *earthly* king.

6:16–21: As in Mark and Matthew, the disciples are well out to sea in the midst of a storm when Jesus comes to them across the water. However, the point of the story in John is not merely the calming of the sea but the majestic statement, “It is I; do not be afraid” (v. 20). “It is I” denotes “I AM.” The words “I AM” were revealed to Moses on Mt. Sinai as God’s name (Exodus 3:14).

August 5, The Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost: John 6:24–35

In **6:16**, we read of the disciples sailing from the east coast of the Sea of Galilee to the region of Capernaum on the west coast.

The crowds (many of whom had likely been among the 5,000) notice that when the disciples get into their boat to sail back to the west coast, Jesus is not with them (6:22). Furthermore, groups of people from Tiberias sail across the sea to the region where the feeding miracle took place (6:23).

6:24: When they arrive in the east bank region, they observe that Jesus and His disciples are no longer there—so they get back into their boats and sail west to Capernaum, looking for Jesus.

V. 25: When the travelers meet Jesus on the west side of the Sea of Galilee, they ask Him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” (The conversation that follows resembles that in ch. 4, which describes Jesus’ conversation with a woman at the well of Sychar in Samaria.) In the following play on words, Jesus tells

them that He came from heaven!

Vv. 26–27: Jesus tells the people that the reason they are looking for Him is because they ate their fill of the loaves that He shared on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. He urges them not to focus on food that enters the stomach, but on the food “that endures for eternal life.” Jesus can and does give people that food! In sharing these insights with His hearers, Jesus refers to Himself as “the Son of Man”—a term that surfaces in Daniel 7:13 and denotes “the true people of God” (the Jewish people!) to whom God will give dominion over the nations for ever and forever. However, God has set His seal on Jesus, the true Son of Man, the true Lord of the nations, the true Lord of time and eternity.

Vv. 28–29: When the people ask what *they must do* to perform the works of God, Jesus tells them that the issue is not what they *do*; it is what they *believe*. And they are to believe in the One whom God has sent. As always, the hopes and dreams of the people are on the material level; they see the miraculous nature of the “sign” of Jesus’ actions, but do not understand its true meaning. Jesus tries to raise their sights above their materialistic outlook, but is met with their persistent inability to understand.

Vv. 30–31: The people now introduce the Passover theme of the manna that God provided for His people during the time of the wilderness wanderings. In Jesus’ day, the rabbinic expectation was that when the Messiah eventually appeared, the manna would fall from the heavens once again. Jesus is that manna.

Vv. 32–35: Jesus tells His hearers that the True Bread is not the bread that their forefathers ate during the wilderness wanderings. It is Jesus’ Father who gives His people the True Bread from heaven, and that True Bread is Jesus and His Word. Only that True Bread can and does give life to the world. When the people ask Jesus to give them this bread *always*, Jesus tells them that He is that bread. Whoever comes to Jesus, the true Bread of Life, will never be hungry and will never be thirsty.

The implications of Jesus words are profound to the extreme, and are sorely needed in our challenged and confused world.