

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

³⁰ The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹ He said to them, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. ³² And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. ³³ Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. ³⁴ As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.

⁵³ When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. ⁵⁴ When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, ⁵⁵ and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶ And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

Four couples rented a summer house for two months. Each couple took a two-week vacation there and took the combined thirteen children of the four families with them. One couple was bragging on this clever plan to a friend when the friend said, “I don’t think two weeks in a cabin with thirteen children would be a fun vacation. “

“Oh no,” they replied. “Those two weeks were absolutely terrible. The vacation was the six weeks at home without the children.”

Today’s scripture begins by telling us that Jesus and his disciples were looking to take some time to get away from it all, to take a bit of a break from the busyness and stress of their mission in dealing with the many, many people who came to them. The disciples had just returned from their first missionary journey as assigned to them by Jesus. They had a lot to share with Jesus. Recognizing their need for rest, Jesus took them away for a time of rest.

Jesus was grateful for the important work they did with enthusiasm, and he appreciated the great effort put forth by them to accomplish what they did. Mark tells us that they had been so busy that they didn’t even have time to stop and eat. Jesus knew that in order for them to continue to be effective in the work yet to be done, they would need a break. It would be a time to physically and emotionally distance themselves from their work, a time to reenergize, a time to feed their souls as they spent time with Jesus and surely, time connecting with God.

We all need to take breaks, to get away from the busyness of life. After the last several months involving ministry during the pandemic, then our move, Annual Conference, evenings helping with Bible School, Don and I are looking forward to our vacation next week at Virginia Beach.

It will be a time for us to relax on the deck of the oceanfront studio apartment we are renting and watch the ocean waves move on shore, read and people-watch (which is always interesting). The get-away will provide refreshment for our mind, body and soul, energizing us for not only for the everyday business of living, but for doing the everyday mission we are on in all that we do and say, the work of God. Yes, we need to take time to get away, taking time each week is just as important as taking vacations. That’s something, I confess, I need to keep reminding myself. Don helps me to do that.

So, we find here in the text that Jesus wants to help the disciples get away for a break. They got in a boat and set out to find a solitary place. But Mark tells us that the people, “saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them.” When Jesus and the disciples came ashore, they were met by a large crowd.

In seeing the crowd, we read, “Jesus had compassion on them.” Unfortunately, once again, our English word, “compassion,” does not begin to capture the emotion that Jesus felt. To really understand what compassion is, we need to do a bit of a word study. Within the word compassion, we find the word passion. The word “passion” comes from the Latin word *passio*, which means “suffering.” We sometimes forget this when we speak of romantic passion, or the passion that someone has for a hobby or sports activity.

The root of the word passion is suffering, which is made very clear to us when we remember Jesus’ suffering and death on the cross which we call the passion of Christ. When we add the prefix, “com”, meaning “with”, we understand that when Jesus shows compassion towards the people around him, it means that he “suffers with” them.

Switching languages to the Greek which the Gospel of Mark is written in, we can go even deeper in our understanding. Compassion’s meaning is more graphic. It means to be moved by something so strongly that you feel it deep in your stomach, deep in your bowels, deep in your guts.

So, we find here in the midst of Jesus and the disciples plan to get away, Jesus is stirred to the depth of his very being at the needs of the people standing before him. Mark tells us, in fact, that Jesus perceived them as being like sheep without a shepherd. For those not familiar to the biblical imagery and understanding of the sheep and their shepherd, this doesn’t make much sense.

A commentary explanation of this imagery teaches us that “in the first century it was well-known that sheep are animals very dependent on their shepherd; with no one to lead them, they wander lost, and with no one to protect them, they are food for predators. The image relating sheep to shepherds is a familiar one in the Old Testament (see 1 Kings 22:17; Psalm 23; Ezekiel 34; Numbers 27:17).

Jesus then comes as the Good Shepherd, not only to the crowd who followed them in this story, but also to all who are lost and in need. Jesus knows that the religious leadership has failed the people who sought him, and so, he steps forward to teach them and give meaning and direction to their lives. Jesus not only taught them, feeding and guiding their spiritual souls; he healed them and helped them with their spiritual needs.

The scriptures bookended by what we heard this morning, tell us one of many stories of Jesus being the Good Shepherd to the people coming to him. It’s the story of him teaching and feeding 5,000-plus people. He fed their souls and miraculously fed all the people using only five loaves of bread and two fish.

Following this story and the story of Jesus walking on water, again as the disciples and Jesus attempted to get away, and land on the shores of Gennesaret, crowds of people who recognize Jesus gather around them. The people helped and even carried the sick to Jesus for him to heal them. Mark tells us that wherever Jesus and his disciples went, Jesus was recognized sought after to heal the sick. Some wanted to merely touch the fringes of his cloak, knowing that even doing this simple exercise would, they would be healed.

Jesus did not question who touched the fringes of his cloak, in this story, like he did in another story when a woman with a bleeding disease touched his cloak; but I would assume that like that time, Jesus felt the power of healing move through him. For Jesus to have compassion

on those in need, he did not need, or likely even have time because so many people came to him, an explanation; nor require his judgement before compassion flowed from his heart. Jesus does his healing in villages, cities and farms, among the rich and the poor, the undeserving and the deserving, adults and children. All who come into contact with his cloak are healed. He came to be the Good Shepherd to all.

Upon a more detailed study of this story, we discover that this text then does not allow us to stop with the lesson of needing rest that we find at the beginning of the story; although this is an absolutely necessary lesson for us to take seriously, so that we continue to be refreshed and energized for the work of helping to build God's kingdom, and so that we can nurture our relationship and faith with God.

The more compelling message is that our Good Shepherd has come to us in Jesus, and this is truly good news. But it also leaves a challenging set of questions for us to answer: Do we have the compassion of the Christ? Are we willing to "suffer with" the hurting people around us? Do we feel the compassion of Jesus in our guts?

Are we too cautious, too judgmental at times to allow ourselves to have the compassion of Jesus? Do we sometimes take the easy way out to help people, perhaps then, enabling people who need more than band-aid solutions to continue being lost in their need? Having the compassion of Jesus sometimes means we need to get down and get our hands dirty, as the saying goes. Can we, do we take the presence of the Good Shepherd to anyone we encounter who has a need? That's what we are called to do.

As you know, we just completed a week of ministry through Bible School. The children who attended and some of our volunteers passed on compassion as through their collection of nonperishable foods and money to give to the hungry. In a few weeks we will be having an opportunity to share compassion with those in need as we participate in various service projects where help is needed.

But also remember, there's so many needs all around us and we don't need to wait for a church program for compassion to reach the poor, the lost, the hurting, the sick and the lonely. Like the disciples, we are each sent out into the world. Each of us can be Christ's instrument of compassion. That's also how it should be.

I want to close with this story. After an accident in which she lost her arm, Jamie refused to go to school or church. Finally, the young teen thought she could face her peers. In preparation her mother called her Sunday School teacher and asked that he not call attention to Jamie. The teacher promised, but then he got sick on Sunday and had to call a substitute.

At the conclusion of the lesson that day, which was about inviting friends to church, the substitute teacher led the class in doing the hand motions to the familiar children's poem: *Here's the church, here's the steeple, open the door and see all the people.*"

Jamie's eyes filled with tears. A thirteen-year-old boy sensed Jamie's pain and knelt beside her. With one hand apiece, they supported each other, making the church, steeple, and people. Together they illustrated what the real church is.

It can be that simple, brothers and sisters. Having the compassion of Jesus can be that simple. Likewise, it can be really tough and challenging. May we when we are presented with the opportunity to offer compassion, the feeling from the heart and gut, be a good shepherd like Jesus and act on it. Amen.