

Gospel - Mark 6: 30-34

8th Sunday After Pentecost

Sermon 7.18.21

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“Jesus had compassion for them,” Mark’s Gospel reports, because the people were as sheep without a shepherd.

There is a shepherding theme in all of our morning readings.

Jeremiah issues strong cautions against those shepherd-leaders or rulers who abuse God’s trust in them to care for God’s people.

King David sings praises to the Shepherd-Lord who guards and guides us through all life’s trials.

The letter to the Ephesians suggests God is unwilling for any one kind of person, Jew or Gentile, to be left out from being fully accepted into the one, true fold of God.

Today’s Gospel takes place in the Spring of CE 29, probably in April. Jesus and his disciples are ministering in Gennesaret, which is all the area of the lake, and specifically he is in Capernaum, a lakeside community. His ministry activity is nonstop and grueling, hard work. The demands begin well before sunrise and end well after nightfall.

I notice Christ’s close followers are called “apostles” in this passage.

Apostle means “one who has been sent,” or a commissioned one. They had been sent by Jesus in groups of two for any-where from four to twelve weeks.

In their own right they made a significant dent of influence, proclaiming good news and demonstrating God’s coming reign.

Returning to Jesus, they shared with him about everything they had taught and done.

This year we are reading through Mark, which is the most action-packed of the Gospels. The adverb “straightway” or “immediately” occurs more often in Mark than it does in any other Gospel. In the first chapter alone the Greek word for “immediately” occurs at least eleven times:

- Immediately coming up from his baptism Jesus sees the heavens tear open and the Spirit descend like a dove
- Immediately thereafter the Spirit drives him into the wilderness of temptation
- Immediately Simon and Andrew leave their fishing nets to follow Jesus
- Immediately after that, Jesus calls out James and John
- Immediately on the Sabbath Jesus enters the Capernaum synagogue and instructs the congregation
- Immediately a man with an unclean spirit cries out
- When Jesus rebukes the devil and delivers him, immediately the incident gets reported everywhere in Galilee

- Immediately after synagogue at Simon's house, Jesus heals his mother-in-law
- Because immediately they had already informed him of her condition
- Sometime afterward Jesus prays for a leper and immediately the leprosy departs from him
- Immediately Jesus sends him away with a warning not to tell anyone; but instead he tells everyone.

You get the idea. There's a lot of fast-paced energy going on in Mark. Jesus justly gets tired. Please remember that he falls into a real state when they try to cross the lake in an overloaded, storm-tossed fishing boat.

Today Jesus recognizes his apostles' exhaustion as well as his own. We can sometimes be quite determined not to think of ourselves at all; but see how Jesus honors the caregivers' needs. He says, "Let's get away for a while and take care of ourselves."

The deserted place Jesus had in mind was either near to Capernaum on the northwest shore, or else located in what is now Hippos National Park, in the northern Jordan Valley overlooking the great lake.

Both locations have ancient churches ruins depicting the feeding of the five thousand. Both have large open gathering spaces suitable for all the throngs who had raced ahead.

So Jesus when thought to carve out some well needed and well deserved alone time for himself and his friends, he was instead prevented by an incalculable mass of individuals, at least 5,000 men not counting women and children. Quite unexpectedly, the intended empty, deserted space gets packed to capacity with desperately needy people.

All the commotion reminds me of John Lennon's famous quip that "Life is what happens when you are busy making other plans." The apostles were making plans for rest and relaxation. No doubt Jesus put them immediately to work instead.

How did they react? Were they annoyed? Irritated? Frustrated? Angry? Resentful? I would be guilty of all these things. I would be annoyed, irritated, frustrated, angry and resentful.

How do you react when your plans are suddenly shattered or disrupted? Or how do you react when life makes a sudden, jolting shift? For example, when your rector seems to promise the possibility of drinking wine from the common cup, then suddenly reverses that decision? (If you did not get the memo, that happened last Sunday morning.)

We have no record of how the apostles were affected; we only have Mark's witness of Jesus, that he had "compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd."

Whenever you see the word compassion, it is a wonderfully descriptive body term.

The Greek word *splanchnizomai* is a verb form of the noun for "spleen." It occurs 12 times in the New Testament, always in the Gospels and almost always referring to Jesus' own emotion. He gets moved in his spleen or gut or the pit of his stomach. He demonstrates compassion toward the crowd, toward individuals in need of healing and to others who need to be delivered from demons. After a manner Jesus acutely feels our various maladies and conditions in the deepest part of his being. This is how he who knew no sin or sickness becomes sin and sickness for us.

The world can be a dangerous place, or at least a perturbing, interrupting one. Jesus' agenda for rest and refreshment was thwarted by throngs of needy bodies and souls crying out for relief. So Jesus had compassion; because how could there be any genuine rest for the few of the people of God when the many

still languish in misery? He wants no one to be lost, but for everyone to be included in the fold—taught, healed, delivered, restored, at rest.

Did the apostles ever get to have their time of rest? I do believe they did. In my imagination I can see it happening for them while they are together in the boat. I see them excitedly reporting, exulting in the afterglow of mission; kicking back, relaxing, laughing, maybe singing, and just quietly enjoying the pleasure of their mutual company. Not a care did they face as they leisurely moved along the gentle surface of the water. They were with Jesus, Jesus was with them, and nothing came along to interfere or interrupt.

Also, I imagine, they were each able to know and feel Jesus' compassion in the boat, so that the rest of the people could receive it for themselves when they were on the ground.

Christ is our peace, Paul says, and God knows we are needy for peace and rest. We need him to make us lie down in green pastures and lead us beside the still waters and restore our soul when we need restoration.

Have you noticed this sanctuary space is shaped in the form of an upside down boat? Why? Because here we are together—with Jesus—in the boat—finding rest and refreshment no earthly thing can provide. Here, too, we create space, again and again, to experience Jesus' personal, individual love and compassion. We call this activity church. We call it worship.

We will have time soon enough to land our boat and disembark onto the shore of the week ahead in order to deal with all the demanding crowds of our various people and activities. When we get there we will have compassion enough. We will have all God's resources required to meet our challenges. But while we are all still able to be here in the vessel together, let's be sure to take full advantage to continue to sing,

Blessed Jesus! Blessed Jesus!

Thou has loved us: love us still.

Blessed Jesus! Blessed Jesus!

Thou has loved us: love us still. Amen.