

“Our Compassionate Good Shepherd”

Mark 6:30-44, Pentecost 11-B, July 19, 2015

A dear Christian lady, who always seemed to have more than her fair share of trouble in life, was also a devoted mother and grandmother! She always did her best to care for those she loved. It seemed as if her whole life was one endless whirlwind of activity.

The good Lord had blessed her with a relatively, long life, though the day came unfortunately when she was taken ill and was admitted to a hospital. The doctor's prognosis was not good—her life in this world was rapidly drawing to its close.

When the pastor heard of this, he immediately went to the hospital to visit her. Given their long history together they certainly had much to talk about. Then the pastor, **recognizing his great calling to be a shepherd to this woman and others** in the congregation, asked her: **“May I read some verses from the Bible to you?”** She said, “Yes!” and so he did. He then asked, **“May I pray with you?”** She said yes and so he did. Then the pastor began speaking to this dear lady, rather glowingly, about the **many mansions in heaven, the angelic choirs, the banquet feasts and all the joyful reunions** that will be celebrated there!

Suddenly, there was unexpected twinge that came over this dear lady's wrinkled face! **“Wow! Heaven sounds like a very busy place! Pastor, do you think the good Lord will just let me rest a while?”**

Brothers and sisters, our Lord Jesus Christ was certainly hoping to carve out some much needed time for him and for his disciples to rest for a while! Jesus was wearied from his teaching and healing ministry; and the twelve disciples (*whom Mark refers to as “apostles” here, because they were apostles at the time he wrote his Gospel*) had just returned from that first missionary journey our dear Lord had sent them on. They were very tired and weary too! How they just wanted some time alone with Jesus to fellowship with him and talk about their most recent experiences!

Therefore Jesus turns to his disciples with a great invitation: **“Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest for a while! For they were coming and going, and they had no leisure, even to eat!** So they boarded what must have been one of Jesus' **disciple's fishing vessels to cross the sea! Sadly enough, there must have been a fierce headwind blowing against that tiny ship. The journey there by sea was actually shorter than the journey there by foot. But somehow this large crowd of people had actually managed to high-tail it around the northern tip of the Sea of Galilee on foot and were already there to greet Jesus and his disciples at their chosen point of destination.**

Jesus' disciples saw these people as nothing more than a gigantic nuisance; a headache that they couldn't get rid of. Certainly Jesus' disciples were hoping that our Lord would banish them immediately from his presence. But this certainly was not the reaction of Jesus. St. Mark tells us: **“He had compassion on them because they were like Jesus without a shepherd and he began to teach them many things!” (Mark 6:34)**

The phrase **“to have compassion upon them”** in the Greek text is one word, a verb; the verb *splagnisomai*; appearing in the past tense here as *esplagnisthe*. We might say in our American culture today, **“Jesus' heart went out to them!”** Or that **“he had compassion on them!”** But the most literal translation would be that **“His guts went out to them!”** Or **“His**

bowels went out to them!” because the Hebrew people saw not the human heart, but a person’s intestines and stomach as the proper center of all their human emotions!

In other words, this was a **gut wrenching experience for Jesus!**

We might talk the same way when we say that a person who has just unfortunately received some bad news, feels as if the wind has totally been knocked out of him; the way a child has the wind knocked out of him when he is running hard, trips and falls to the ground. But in this case, it is not a physical injury, but an emotional, psychological and spiritual injury!

What was does it mean to “be sheep without a shepherd”? The great German Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was put to death in a gas chamber during World War II, because of his blatant opposition to Hitler and the Nazi regime sought to answer that question this way. He said, “These are people who live with many questions, but no answers, with distress but no relief, with anguish of conscience but no deliverance, with tears but no consolation, with sin but no forgiveness!” In every generation, Bonhoeffer contended that there are human beings everywhere, who left to themselves, **are waiting for good news, but all they receive is good advice.**

Jesus was willing to live with the interruption, but as the daylight hours are drawing to a close, his disciples make one more attempt to coax Jesus to send this immense crowd of people away! **“Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat” (Mark 6:36)!** And the words of Jesus that disciples heard next must have surely shocked them! Jesus said to his disciples: **“You give them something to eat!” (v. 37)**

And all Jesus’ disciples initially could do was to see dollar signs! You know the attitude: “We don’t have the money for that! Jesus, you’ve got to be kidding!” -- And perhaps they did not have the money for that! After all, when Jesus sent them out on their first missionary journey, he told them: **“Take no money in your belt!” (Mark 6:8)** And in addition to this fact, Jesus also told them: **“Take no bread with you either!” (v. 8)**

Jesus wasn’t asking them, however, what they did not have, but what they actually did have! And it was **Andrew** we know from the other Gospel accounts who found that young boy with the five barley loaves and two fish.

Perhaps Jesus’ disciples were insinuating that if they dared to share whatever it was that they did have with others, there wouldn’t be enough left for themselves! From the Biblical perspective, however, the truly rich person is the person who is rich enough in faith to believe that God will never penalize us for what we give away of our own resources to help others. Did not Jesus make this very clear to us one day when he said, **“Give and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap!” (Luke 6:38)**

Disciples of Jesus need to do more than lament the crowd’s hunger and the lack of food, while sending them away! And Christians have certainly not

done their duty if all they do is to point out the problems in society and lament them.

But are we willing to give to our Lord and Savior Jesus today what we do have to carry out his work in this world? On that day Jesus told his disciples, *“You give them something to eat!”* But shortly before he ascended into heaven, he gave us **another command: “Go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, and lo, I will be with you always to the end of the age!”** (Matthew 28:18-20)

But sometimes we are far more interested in receiving ministry from others than we are in ministering to others ourselves! That is, until we grow in our faith to the point that we gladly do what Jesus says in **Matthew 10:8**, *“Freely you have received, freely give!”*

And isn't this really when a congregation, like ours, continues not only to thrive, but grow? One of the greatest blessings God has given to this church is the **active ministry of our Stephen Ministers** who have answered the Lord's call to active ministry in the Spirit of Isaiah, *“Here, am I! Send me! Send me!”* (Isaiah 6:8)

But there are always those persons too **who are only interested in receiving from the Lord, but not interesting in sharing of their abundant resources to genuinely expand the ministry of the church to others!** National statistics show that the **AVERAGE church member in the United States gives only 3 percent of their income to help fulfill the great commission**, and they give **less than 3 percent of their actual time and talents** in a life of active involvement in the church's ministry.

Have you ever wondered why Jesus told the disciples to gather up the leftovers following the feeding of the five thousand, so that they ended up gathering twelve baskets of leftovers? Weren't those leftovers to remind them about the true identity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; of his Person and his Work?

Immediately after this episode, the Lord commands that his disciples get into the boat and head to another shore near the village of Bethsaida. They board the boat in response to Jesus' command while he goes up onto a mountain to pray. Later that evening, that boat full of disciples, is caught up in a horrendous storm! To make matters worse, they see some type of figure walking out there on the water! It was Jesus, but they did not know it was Jesus! Perhaps, Jesus would have walked right by them on his way **to Bethsaida**, if they had not caught him out of the corner of their eye, but it was Jesus' intention that they should notice him! They fear the worst! They think it is a ghost! But then Jesus gives his disciples those wonderful words of blessed assurance that he gives them throughout the Gospels 27 times, even as he often gives us those same words still today: **“Do not be afraid! It is I!”** (Mark 6:50)

Mark concludes this event by telling us: ***“And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened!” (v. 51-52)*** Four chapters later a similar scenario presents itself again, and once again the disciples ask Jesus: ***“How can we feed these people here with bread in this desolate place” (Mark 8:4)?***

Jesus does a repeat miracle – feeding 4000 people this time with 7 loaves of bread and a few fish!

Jesus practice of compassion always resulted in some type of tangible action being carried out on his part. And the ultimate act of the compassion is when he went to the cross to purchase for us with his life’s blood, the forgiveness of our sins. Even there his compassion is still causing him to say such things as: “Father, forgive them... Mother behold your son, son behold your Mother! And...truly today you will be with me in paradise!”

Sometimes we forget, don’t we, that even though Jesus calls us to active ministry and a deep sense of personal involvement in the work that he has given us to do, that it’s not really us, but it is the LORD who is at work within us to carry out his will!?! That’s what Paul wrote to the Philippians one day: ***“It is God who is at work in you both to do and to will of his own good pleasure!” (Philippians 2:13)***

Friends, do you ever forget that? I know that I certainly forget that! I can get so stressed out about the sermon I am hopefully going to preach on Sunday, during the week, even after 34 years of preaching on Sunday morning, because I do not always hang on tightly to that promise Jesus gives to me in **Matthew 10:19**, ***“Do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour!”*** And most of the time, I go home on Sunday mornings, knowing for our Lord’s promise to me and to all of us, in this regard, is abundantly true!

But we forget that don’t we? So let me close by telling you a little story about the great German physicist Dr. Albert Einstein. You might remember that he was visiting the United States when Hitler came to power in 1933, and because he was Jewish, he did not go back to Germany but lived out the rest of his life among us here.

Well, the story goes that Dr. Einstein traveled all over the United States, lecturing to faculty and students everywhere, about his “Theory of Relativity.” He made those journeys with the assistance of a chauffeur-driven limousine.

One day as they were driving down the road together on their way to the next university, the chauffeur commented to the great professor: **“Dr. Einstein, I have heard you give that lecture so many times about the Theory of Relativity I bet I could deliver that lecture myself!”**

Dr. Einstein said, “Let’s give it a try. Before we get to the university we will stop somewhere and exchange clothes! After all, no one at that university has ever seen me before!

They don't know what I look like! So they did this very thing! And wouldn't you know it, the chauffeur pretending to be Dr. Einstein stood up and delivered that powerful lecture flawlessly on the "Theory of Relativity!"

All went well until the very end, when the MC that day got up and thanked Dr. Einstein for his lecture, but then asked: "**Are there any questions from the audience?**" Only one man raised his hand in the air, who ended up asking a very complex scientific question involving mathematical equations and formulas.

The **quick-thinking chauffeur replied**, "**Sir, the solution to that problem is so simple, I'm really surprised you asked me to give it to you! Indeed just to prove how simple it is, I'm going to ask my chauffeur to step forward and give you the answer!**"

We don't always remember what St. Paul teaches us, do we? "***It is God who is at work in you both to will and to do of his own good pleasure!***" And we forget the promise of our Crucified, Risen, Ascended and Glorified Lord, "***Do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour!***" (*Matthew 10:19*) Amen