

He Had Compassion on Them — Rev. Denise Stone

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

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As I read today's text from Mark, Chapter 6, let me ask you to keep two words in mind: needs and compassion.

Mark 6, verses 30-34 and 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.ⁱ

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God.

Our texts from Mark's Gospel today are transitional stories that move the reader from one major story to the next.

It would be easy to overlook these passages and to focus on the miracle stories of the feeding of the five thousand and Jesus walking on water.

To skip over these passages, however, would be missing out on invaluable lessons.

There are many different things we could take away from today's texts.

I am going to focus on the related items of Compassion and Need for this morning.

The word translated "compassion," [in today's text] *esplanchnisthe*, is the word for bowels—guts, and describes a sympathetic feeling that starts in the deepest regions of a person's being.ⁱⁱ

Professor Karoline Lewis says explaining compassion in this passage,

You know that feeling — where your reaction to something sends your stomach churning. You get a hitch that you sense physically, primitively. You feel that pit, suddenly, even painfully. That's compassion — a visceral feeling.ⁱⁱⁱ

Compassion is not just limited to a feeling, however. Compassion comes with a responding action. Look for this aspect as we continue looking at the Scriptures.

While compassion needed a bit more of an explanation, I dare say that we all can define and understand Need. We need — water, food and shelter. We need emotional security. In our day and time, we need financial resources, and many would argue, access to healthcare. Need. We get that.

Compassion and Need.

The first part of our passages for today, verses 30-34, complete the story of Jesus sending out the twelve disciples on the mission of teaching and healing.

This story is a sandwich, which if you'll remember is so common in Mark. The middle part of the sandwich is the

Death of John the Baptist. I very briefly mentioned that text in last week's sermon.

Let's focus in on these 5 verses, verses 30-34.

What we see in this second half of the sending out of the twelve, is that the apostles have returned to Jesus with tales of their own teaching and healing ministry. We see Jesus' recognition of their need for rest and his plans to provide that rest to the disciples.

Jesus identifies a need and has compassion. Feelings in action.

Jesus and the twelve get into a boat to go away to a deserted place to rest and presumably to eat (since it says that the disciples had not had time to eat).

Their plans for rest, however, were interrupted.

That sounds a bit too familiar. 😊.

Hear verses 33 and 34 again,

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.

Jesus and his followers can no longer go around unrecognized. We will see this again in the second part of our pair of texts.

Jesus sees the crowd and has compassion on them. For they are like sheep without a shepherd.

Let me remind you about the idea of the sheep without a shepherd.

The sheep/shepherd image is frequent in the OT, primarily for the relationship between God and his people but also with regard to their need for human leadership under God;^{iv}

These verses, sandwiching the story of Herod having John the Baptist beheaded, bring to mind these Old Testament images of God as Israel's shepherd and the prophets blasting the human "shepherds" of Israel for their failures.

Mark is making it clear that Jesus is not a shepherd like Herod and other national and religious leaders, rather Jesus is a shepherd in the same manner as God is shepherd.

Jesus sees the needs of the people that have hurried ahead to where they were going to rest. Jesus puts his and his disciples needs to the side for the moment and focuses his compassion on the crowd of people. First, by teaching them and then, in the part of the story we do not have for today, he feeds them – five thousand men, not counting women and children.

Jesus identifies a need and has compassion. Feelings in action.

Let's move on to the second part of our texts for today. Verses 53 to 56.

Between verses 30-34 and 53-56 we have two miracle stories: the feeding of the five thousand, and Jesus walking on water. These are major events – both for the disciples and those who see or are a part of these events.

And we come to verse 53 and it almost feels like a let-down.

Jesus and the disciples get out of the boat at Gennesaret and are immediately recognized.

Again, Jesus and his followers can no longer go around unrecognized.

People with all sorts of needs from that region on the Western Shore of the Sea of Galilee descend on Jesus and his disciples.

Verses 54 and following,

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.

Jesus identifies needs and has compassion. Feelings in action.

Just as the first part of our texts today included a possibly hidden critique of Herod as a shepherd (given his treatment of John), this part of our text may include a hidden critique of the rich and well-to-do.

We see this in the fact that the healings happened in the marketplaces.

Why is this so?

According to Theologian, Elizabeth Webb,

The word translated “marketplace,” *agora*, refers to a public space in which legal hearings, elections, and debates took place, in addition to the buying and selling of goods. Thus the marketplace was the political and commercial center of a city or town.

By healing the sick, the weakest and most vulnerable members of a community, in this space, Jesus is subverting the economy of this world through the very inauguration of God’s kingdom economy. While the marketplaces of the world belong to the rich and powerful, in the kingdom of God this most political and commercial of spaces is occupied by those with the least.^v

Needs and Compassion.

Jesus recognized needs and showed compassion – feelings in action.

All of this sounds great, but what does it have to do with us, now, in this place?

Every one of us in this room has needs.

Just as I mentioned needs earlier – water, food, shelter, etc. There are other needs that are less than obvious.

Perhaps you need a better job, improved relationships with family and friends. Or perhaps you have physical problems – with your health or structurally with your house.

Needs.

What are ***your*** needs this morning?

Seriously, what are your needs – not your wants, but ***your needs***? Take a couple of moments to think about that question.

Two follow-up questions:

What would ***you*** need to change to meet those needs?
and,

How can the church help you meet those needs?

Or put another way, how can the church have ***compassion*** for those needs?

Another set of questions for you to consider:

1)What are the needs of this community?

Take a couple of moments to think about that question.

2)How can the church help you meet those needs?
Or put another way, how can the church have
compassion for those needs?

There is a piece of paper I want to hand to everyone as well as a pencil.

I want you to think about these questions and jot down suggestions for yourself and you can tear off the bottom part after you jot down suggestions for this church to demonstrate compassion to the needs you know of in our community.

At the end of our service, feel free to drop that bottom half in the white offering basket on the back table.

Needs and Compassion.

Jesus recognized needs and showed compassion – feelings in action.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to do no less.

Please pray with me.

Almighty God,
by your Holy Spirit
you have made us one with your saints
in heaven and on earth:
Help us to see your presence
burning in the hearts of others;
grant that we may be united
in a fellowship of love and prayer;
give us the courage to pick up our cross
and respond to the needs of the world,
give us the stamina to follow you,
to be your hands and heart in the world;
enable us to witness to your grace and mercy.
We pray all this
through the love your son, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**^{vi}

ⁱ New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

ⁱⁱ <https://sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary/new-testament-mark-630-34-53-56/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/dear-working-preacher/the-dew-of-compassion>.

^{iv} France, R. T.. The Gospel of Matthew (The New International Commentary on the New Testament) (p. 372). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.. Kindle Edition.

^v <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-16-2/commentary-on-mark-630-34-53-56-3>.

^{vi} <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/search/label/Proper%2011%20B>. written by Terri, and posted on RevGalBlogPals. <http://revgalblogpals.blogspot.ca/2008/08/take-up-your-cross.html>.