

SERMON FOR SUN. JULY 18 AND WED. JULY 21, 2021

Pent 8B Mark 6:30-34 “Our Compassionate God.”

Dear fellow redeemed of the Lord, in today’s Gospel lesson the apostles were tired and weary. They’d just returned from a missionary journey in which they’d learned to rely on God’s providence and successfully preached repentance, cast out demons, and healed many who were sick.

We’re not told how long they were gone, but now that they’d returned and reported to Jesus all that happened, in all likelihood, they were both *physically* and *mentally* exhausted.

So, Jesus directs them to get away across the Sea of Galilee to an isolated place in the wilderness so that they can rest **with** Him and **in** Him. A little alone time must have sounded like music to the ears of those weary apostles!

But when they arrive in the “desolate” place, they find out it isn’t so desolate at all! The crowds have gotten there ahead of them, and a cacophony of cries for help the sweet music of rest. So they look at Jesus . . . what should they do? *What would He do?*

We’ll get to that in a moment. From hearing the Gospel lesson a few moments ago, you already know of Jesus’ compassion for the crowds. But we mustn’t jump there too quickly. We first need to think about *ourselves* and our compassion, or the lack thereof.

Because there are crowds of people all around us crying for help. Are we compassionate? And not just in our minds and hearts, but in our actions? Well, *sometimes* yes!

Sometimes we’ll give to the poor, help a neighbor or better yet, witness to them. But how often? One, two, or **even four** out of ten times? After all, we rationalize, we’re not made out of money and our time is limited. Surely, we can’t help everyone!

Even when we do show compassion, you know what happens? Our pride sets in, expecting thanks from those needy wretches in return for our act of *gallantry*.

Or we please ourselves by thinking how much better we are than those around us who did nothing.

Or our sinful nature kicks in, and we feel resentment for those people imposing on us in the first place! And as a result, whatever good we might have done is tainted by sin.

And when we're tired, we are far less likely to feel compassion. Just go away!

We know what we *should* do, how we *should* be, but our fallen nature is more inclined to look for #1 than to act compassionately toward our neighbors. Is any of that ringing a bell? **PAUSE**

I wonder if those weary apostles felt the same way when they arrived on the other side of the Sea of Galilee and saw the needy multitudes waiting for them there. Were they a little resentful? Perhaps selfishly jealous that the crowds were imposing on their rest time? If they're anything like us...

When St. Paul wrote in the Epistle about those "**who once were far off, but who have now been brought near,**" . . . we usually think he's referring to *other* people.

But you know what? It's me. And you. Our love fails. Our compassion fails. We fail. Our thoughts, words, deeds, and desires!) make us **far off** the mark, **far off** from our Lord.

But St. Paul also said something very important in that little phrase: you **who once were far off**. You who at one time were **far off** in sin and rebellion, but who **have now been brought near by the blood of Christ**.

You see, where our compassion fails, Paul wants you to know, the compassion of God does not.

The compassion of our Father in His Son, Jesus Christ is sure, trustworthy, and never-ending. It does not – it *cannot* – fail. **PAUSE**

Which brings us back to the shore of the Sea of Galilee that day, and the hordes of people and those weary apostles. They looked at Jesus . . . *what would He do?*

Mark tells us that Jesus has **compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd**. Jesus has compassion on *them*, the crowds but also, on the apostles as well. Jesus feeds **them all** with His Word and all rest.

The prophet Jeremiah had foretold that the Lord Himself would come and shepherd His people in care and compassion. "**Behold, the days are coming,**" Jeremiah had said and indeed, that day had come.

David's descendant, **the righteous Branch**, had come to do what only He could do: gather His people, atone for their sins, feed them with His Word, and give them perfect care and compassion, that unlike ours, was not tainted by sin.

The ones far off are now being brought near – not through their own efforts to draw near to God! – but because the Lord has come near to them.

In fact, as near and as close as could possibly be: God and man in the one person of Jesus Christ. **One new man in place of the two, making peace.**

And so was that day in that desolate place along the Sea of Galilee. In that place, compassion, peace, comfort, rest, feeding, forgiveness, Word, and life are all brought to bear.

All that is needed is there. For God had compassion on us and sent His Son.

And so it is for us saints today; the church is an outpost in an increasingly hostile, desolate world. Yet, the same compassion, peace, comfort, rest, feeding, forgiveness, Word, and life is here for us, **for the same Lord is here.**

Even at their best, our friends and neighbors will fail us; our family and fellow Christians will fail us; your pastor will fail you. But your Lord, your Savior, will never fail you.

And so whatever desolate place you find yourself in – cut off from Godly joy by the desolation of loneliness, addiction or fear; missing out on godly peace due to anger, resentment, weariness, busy-ness...whatever your desolate place may be, our Lord has come to give you rest.

To bring the water of baptism and life to the desert of sin and death.

To bring the food of His body and blood to our hungry souls.

To bring the comfort and consolation of His forgiveness to the fear and rebellion of our hearts and minds.

To bring His cross, and the compassion that flows from it, into our lives, that we who once were far off, may be far off no more.

And not only be brought near to God, but you've been *joined* to God – you in Christ and Christ in you – one body, one flesh.

God Almighty has joined himself to us so that, as we say in our rite of marriage, what God has joined together, man may not put asunder.

Please note, all these blessings are independent of our actions. Our repentance is only our acknowledgment that we are far off, but repentance alone doesn't bring us any closer to God.

Our peace is in the compassion of God that drove Him to promise a Savior, to send prophets to proclaim His promises, and then to send His Son to be that Savior.

To send His Son – *in compassion* – to go to the cross, to atone for our sins and die our death.

Jesus came to, as St. Paul preached, “**kill the hostility,**” between God and us— and give us the peace of sins forgiven by His death and resurrection.

All that Jesus has done is now given to us by grace through faith. His resurrection is our resurrection, and His life is our life.

And then in compassion, God sent His apostles to proclaim this promise fulfilled, and still today He sends His pastors to preach this Word of compassion and life.

God sends us as ambassadors to a desolate world, to people far off, so that all might be brought near. Not because of what we do, but because of what our Savior is doing.

Because our Savior is still here, still saving, still forgiving, that we do not grow weary of doing good, or of telling all the world of His compassion and great love.

For He as St. Peter said, God is building us all into **a holy temple in the Lord**, the Church, built on **Christ as the cornerstone, and the foundation of the apostles and prophets.**

That we might declare and demonstrate his compassion to a fallen world and so that we who are weak and weary might have rest – for both body and soul.

So repent and fill your ears with His wisdom and Word, and then come to His table to partake of the bread of life.

The good news this morning is that you are not sheep without a shepherd. The Good Shepherd, your Savior is here in compassion to serve you, to refresh you, to forgive you, and to bless you. All that is needed is here for He is here, **for you.** AMEN