

July 21, 2024
Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Mark 6:30–44

YOU WERE LIKE A SHEEP WITHOUT A SHEPHERD.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Our God is a God of love, mercy, and **compassion**. He opens His hand and satisfies the desires of every living thing. (cf: Psalm 145:16) Jesus says:

“He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” (Matthew 5:45)

But basic human necessities such as food, water, shelter, are not our God’s only concern. He’s concerned for the whole person, both body and soul. He has **compassion** and:

“... desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Timothy 2:4)

Because of the sin that you and I were born into, we were alienated and hostile toward God, doing evil deeds. (cf: Colossians 1:21) So in His mercy, God sent His only begotten Son in human flesh, to die on the cross to relieve sin’s effects on our everyday human existence: disease, hunger, thirst, clothing and shelter, as well as sin’s spiritual, eternal effects, reconciling you and me and all mankind to God through His death on the cross, thereby killing the hostility. (cf: Ephesians 2:13–16)

Our heavenly Father does not withhold His good gifts from anyone – believer and unbeliever alike. Although we do not deserve His goodness, He still provides for all our needs of body and soul. We see His **compassion** for all people in today’s Gospel text. Prior to our text, Jesus had sent His disciples out two by two as His fully empowered ambassadors and under-shepherds, giving them authority over unclean spirits and to proclaim repentance and the Good News of the Kingdom of God. (Mark 6:7–13) They cast out many demons. They anointed many who were sick with oil and healed them. In our text this morning, St. Mark records:

“The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught.” (Mark 6:30)

Scripture doesn’t say how long the disciple under-shepherds were away on their missionary trip or how far they traveled. We can only imagine their exhaustion at their return – and – the excitement they felt as they told Jesus all that they had done and taught. We can **also** only imagine the sorrow going through Jesus’ mind, as the verses immediately preceding our text tell of the horrific beheading and martyrdom of John the Baptist.

Being fully human, as our Brother, Jesus experienced every human feeling, tribulation, and struggle. He faced the same human dilemmas and temptations that you face. He suffered sadness and loss. Scripture doesn't say that Jesus was grieved at the death of John the Baptist, but He must have been. We know that later Jesus wept at the death of His friend Lazarus. (cf: John 11:35) But John was Jesus' cousin. John is the first one to recognize Jesus as the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. (cf: John 1:29) Jesus said John was the greatest prophet ever born of a woman. (cf: Luke 7:28)

News about Jesus' teachings and mighty works had been spreading across Galilee. It was becoming quite common for crowds to follow Him. While they didn't fully understand who He was, they recognized Him as someone special and would follow Him from one place to another. Like the paparazzi following the rich and famous, the crowds in our text are unmoved by John's murder, Jesus' grief, or how exhausted the disciples were. They continue to come and go and occupy Jesus to the extent that He and the twelve have no time for rest and recuperation, no time for prayer and meditation, and no time even to eat. Grieving John's murder and having empathy for the fatigue of His disciples, Jesus said:

“Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.” (cf: Mark 6:31)

They get into a boat to sail to a quiet and restful place along the Sea of Galilee. But the crowds have something else in mind. They somehow determine where Jesus and His disciples are heading and run on foot ahead of them, arriving at the shore before the boat. (cf: Mark 6:33)

You know what it is to be mentally and physically exhausted to the point where all you want is rest and relaxation – no phone calls – no visitors – no interruptions. You want nothing more than peace and quiet so you can regroup and revitalize. As you collapse on the couch, wearily hanging onto your last thread of energy and sanity, how do you react when someone knocks at the door or the phone rings? Do you go to the door or pick up the phone – or do you hide even further into your couch? In our text, Mark records that:

“When [Jesus] went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things.” (Mark 6:34)

Jesus didn't greet them with a grouchy voice. He didn't demand that they have ***compassion*** on Him and grieve John's death with Him. He didn't send them away, saying that He had other important things to do like tend to His disciples. He didn't get back on the boat and sail to another location. No. He had ***compassion*** on them.

Jesus' ***compassion*** isn't a passive thought like saying: *“I feel your pain.”* Nearly every single time this word ***“compassion”*** shows up in Scripture, it's referring to Jesus, who has ***compassion*** and does something miraculous. (cf: Matthew 9:36, 14:14, 15:32, 20:34; Mark 6:36, 8:2, 9:22; Luke 7:13, 10:33) In the original language, this ***compassion*** describes a gut-wrenching emotion that moves Jesus deep inside. He knows that not everyone gathered believes He is the Christ. He knows that many of them are seeking a miracle worker, not a Savior. He knows that many of them are only looking for their own interests. Instead of worrying about Himself or His disciples in this desolate place, the Good Shepherd has ***compassion*** on these sheep without a shepherd, and begins to teach them many things.

The people lacked both governmental and spiritual leadership. Both groups of leaders were negligent and corrupt. Herod wasn't shepherding God's people. He had just beheaded God's prophet, John, in order to preserve his pathetic reputation. He was a friend of the Romans, punishing those who opposed him and rewarding those who took his side and defended his corruption.

The Jewish religious leaders weren't shepherding God's people either. These so-called shepherds of Israel repeatedly hung the full weight of God Law around the necks of their flock, abandoning them to despair in the teachings of wolves dressed in sheep's clothing, and those who gave them false hope. This wandering flock of sheep was easy prey for the devil, the world, and their own sinful flesh. And Jesus had *compassion* on them.

As the day grew late, physical hunger became an issue. Rather than sending the crowds away as the disciples wished, Jesus had the disciples gather together all the food they had, which amounted to the simple elements of five loaves of bread and two fish. He commanded them all to recline in groups on the green grass. Then:

"... taking the five loaves and the two fish, [Jesus] looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people... And they all ate and were satisfied." (Mark 6:41–42)

Jesus' words were eucharistic, pointing forward to, not only His institution of the Lord's Supper, but also the Marriage Feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom, which has no end in eternity. (cf: Revelation 19:6–10)

So, what does this miracle of feeding 5,000 have to do with you and me? You and I are exactly like the crowds who were following Jesus. You spend much of your life like a sheep without a shepherd. Like sheep, you wander about in a herd mentality. When one sheep moves, the others tend to follow – even if moving in the wrong direction. Sheep are *food-oriented*, meaning they can be led from one place to another with a bucket of food. You're easily led away by the latest fads and desires of the world. There are times when you wander away from the flock, following your hunger for wealth, popularity, and the desires of the flesh.

In these dark and later days, many of God's sheep stay out late on Saturday night, following the wandering flock of unbelievers, seeking the pleasures of the world and then on Sunday morning, they're too tired to come to the Divine Service. They stay home for rest and recuperation, figuring that it's no big deal. But in reality they are spiritually starving themselves. If you miss one Sunday a month, you miss three months during the year. If you miss two Sunday's a month, you're missing almost half of the year. Sheep who turn their backs on the nourishment of the Good Shepherd in the Divine Service risk dying of spiritual starvation.

If you view the Divine Service as something optional or just primarily something you do for God, then you can do it at home. But if the Divine Service is where the Good Shepherd comes to you to make you lie down in green pastures, lead you beside still waters, restore your soul, and lead you in paths of righteousness for His name's sake – you gotta be there. (cf: Psalm 23:1–4) If

this is the place where the Good Shepherd forgives your sins and feeds you in body and soul unto life everlasting – you gotta be here.

You have a Good Shepherd. His name is Jesus, the name which means "*Yahweh saves.*" (ANLEX, 2023; cf: Matthew 1:21) You were once far off but have been brought near by the blood of Christ crucified for you. (cf: Ephesians 2:13) He adopted you and made you a member of His flock in baptismal waters. He has *compassion* on you because you are like a sheep without a shepherd. He knows His own, and His own know Him. (cf: John 10:14) He knows what you need – and – He acts to deliver you. He knows your joys and your sorrows. He knows the chaos, confusion, and physical and emotional pain that you suffer. He knows your need – and lovingly acts to sustain and deliver you.

He comes to you in this place to teach you the Good News of the Gospel and to forgive you all of your sins: your sins of wandering away from His flock and following your hunger for the pleasures of the world and the flesh; your sin of not loving the Lord your God and your neighbor as you ought; your sin of not loving and keeping God's Law as He demands.

He forgives you in the Name of the Father,
and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

On the cross, Christ died to relieve sin's effects on your everyday human existence in body and soul, reconciling you and me and all mankind to God, through His bloody sacrificial death.

Now, having been forgiven of your sins and hearing the Good News of the Gospel, your Good Shepherd bids you to recline in the green pastures and beside the still waters of this altar, where He feeds you with His very body and blood, in, with, and under, the simple elements of bread and wine. Come to this altar and eat our Lord's holy body and drink His precious blood to strengthen you in body and soul to preserve you in the true faith until you recline with all the saints in glory at the Marriage Feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom which has no end.

In response to your Good Shepherd's loving kindness and *compassion*, enabled by the Holy Spirit given you in Baptism, you can leave this place and have *compassion* on others – not that it earns you anything toward salvation – but in response to the love of the One who has *compassion* on you. You cannot do it perfectly. Any and all *compassion* you offer flows from the believer by the grace of God. Many are still wandering helpless as sheep without a shepherd. Have *compassion* on them – and teach them many things about the love and *compassion* of the Good Shepherd who died for them and desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.