

Where Ever We Are

Reflections on Mark 6:30-34; 53-56

by Michael Barrett July 22, 2018

Today's Scripture begins with the apostles' return to Jesus after having been sent out on their first missionary journey. John the Baptist has been executed while the apostles have been healing and teaching in Jesus' name.

You probably noted that the lectionary has presents for a split reading. Verses 30-34 are an introduction to both Jesus' feeding of the five thousand and the incidence of his walking on the stormy waters of the Sea of Galilee. The reading however, skips over both of those two great miracle stories and picks up with verses 53-56, a brief account of Jesus' healing ministry.

The editors of the lectionary likely did this because there is significant and substantial content in today's verses that might be too easily obfuscated by the magnificence of the two miracle stories. It is important to realize that this reading speaks to how God views the world and how God asks us to view the world. Within these verses there are at least three themes that Mark emphasizes:

First, God is serious about our taking time out of busy work and daily routine to allow our Father to restore, reclaim, and reinvigorate us. Left on our own, we may be likely to allow the busy demands of life to dominate and in the end drain, devastate, and even destroy us. This theme derives from both Genesis and Exodus and this morning Jesus will expand its import to beyond the Sabbath.

Second, God is serious about the importance of compassion, especially for the downtrodden and desperate sheep with no shepherd.

Third, God is serious about how our actions are recognized as reflecting the behavior of Jesus.

First – give it a rest!

The apostles reunited AROUND JESUS. Jesus is their focus, their core, and their center. They anxiously report back to him on all the healing, preaching, teaching, and good deed doing they've accomplished. People are coming and going so fast that the apostles are so wound up they don't even take to share a fellowship meal. Does this sound familiar? Why do so many fast food restaurants make it even faster by providing a drive through window?

Jesus' reaction is not to accelerate this rush to perform by praising it. He neither extolls their efforts nor pats them on the back nor distributes gold stars. No – *come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.* These words are not just good advice to mull over. This is an imperative. This is a command.

Jesus is more interested in maintaining a nourishing, supportive relationship with his followers that in measuring statistically how much they have accomplished. He sends us out on an assignment, but he wants us back for reflection, relief, and readjustment.

If we are serious about maintaining in the long run our ministries of preaching, teaching, healing, justice seeking, and peace making, as well as, our mission to honor Christ, grow in Christ, and serve Christ; we need to take time to set ourselves apart to be in the presence of God. It is by that sort of retreat, we allow God the opportunity to sustain us, to nourish us, to renew us, to protect us, and to direct us.

The demanding work of effective discipleship to be requires time to rest, play, eat, and enjoy one another.

Activity needs to be balance with relaxation,
companionship with solitude,
labor with celebration,

and the competition in the rat race with recuperation from it.
We need time apart to pay attention to God and to seek the meaning of his will.
God is ready wherever and when ever we are.

How many of us regularly generate 'to-do' lists? How often are prayer time and rest enumerated on those lists?

Ah, but what about reality. Right?

What happens to Jesus and the apostles on their way to that solitary retreat?
Many who saw them leaving recognized them and RAN on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.

Even this wilderness area near Mount Tab[i]gha is not remote enough.

The mob scurries, scampers and stampedes. The crowd is measured at 5000 men and probably 15000 or more women and children. This is a huge demographic – the largest nearby town, Capernaum has a residency of only 2-3 thousand.

What Does Jesus do?

Secondly -- Compassion Surpasses those best laid plans!
Jesus immediately makes an exception and puts the retreat plans on hold.
'He has compassion on them, because they are like sheep without a shepherd.'

Jesus extends caring, tenderness, and mercy on the spot, because God is serious about the importance of compassion. Wherever we are, compassion is a priority. God is like Jesus and the way Jesus felt toward the crowd that day is the same way God feels toward you and I.

Compassion – the Greek word is *splagchizomai* – feeling such a deep sympathy, mercy, and loving concern that you can feel it in your stomach. Com (with) and *passio* (suffering).

Not just pity (having sympathy for).

Not just sympathy (having a desire to alleviate suffering).

Not just commiseration (outward expression)

Not just condolences (formal expression)

But genuine compassion (going so deep it feels as if you're bearing the suffering, sharing the agony).

But now what is Jesus' first reaction! Does he heal the sick? Caste out some demons? Change warm water into cool wine? Sit everyone down for a loaves and fishes dinner? Demonstrate his buoyancy?

NO!!! *'He began teaching them many things.'* His first priority is not answering physical or emotional needs, but offering the opportunity for spiritual learning leading to afford spiritual healing.

There are many agencies and many professions that address physical or emotion suffering – therapist, counselors, physicians, there's hospitals and clinics and drugs and lots of self help reading materials and seminars. But, Jesus is reminding us that often what people really need is to be made whole with God. And as Jesus' followers we need to listen very carefully to that message. We may be more than Jesus' hands and feet. We may be his voice, as well.

What did Jesus teach them? Many things – the parables of life, about the eternity of being, about sacrifices made in love, about sincere compassion and genuine selflessness, about loving your neighbor as yourself, about forgiving your enemies, about helping the meek, the thirsty, the grieving, and visiting the prisoner, about making peace and maybe about doing social justice.

But Jesus' most radical and compassionate teaching was about God.

Prior to Jesus, few if any, saw the Deity as a father. Most saw God as ominous, wrathful, vengeful, angry and down right vindictive. A God who could only be approached with great caution and the utmost guard. Exacting

ritual was required and sometimes it was all better left to a caste of priests. Many still hold on to that malevolent conception of God. The problem with that conception is that if one believes in a hateful God, then one is justified in acting hatefully like him. Hating others and even worse hating oneself.

Jesus was teaching that crowd the same things he is still trying to teach us. We need to listen to those lessons, remember them and voice them in our own missions of mercy. Most suffering people will not hear that message anywhere else.

They need to hear Jesus' message of a Father Creator who is personal and intimate, who loves unconditionally, and is moved by what happens to his children even to the point of seeking us out in the flesh wherever we are. If one believes in a loving God, then one is justified in acting lovingly like him.

Thirdly – Recognition is Vital.

Twice in this passage people recognize Jesus – once as he tries to leave and once when the boat docks.

How were they able to recognize Jesus?

Did they see him on television?

Did they check him out on his Facebook page?

Did they see his photo on the front of one of the supermarket tabloids?

The fact is they did not know what he looked like. The fact is that to this day, we still don't know what Jesus looked like. Nowhere in the gospels is a physical depiction of him provided.

If the crowds didn't recognize him by his physical appearance, they sure did recognize him by the nature of his actions.

He cares enough about them to come to them. They do not have to travel to his place of business or residence.

He heals them physically and emotionally, and even more importantly spiritually.

He makes them whole and right with God.

He doesn't scold them when they grow unruly – he sees their poverty and desperation, their lost-ness and their leaderless-ness and extend real compassion.

He lives the life he preaches.

He informs them of a God of love and hope rather than apathy and distance.

All of which leads us to the profound if disturbing implication that recognition of Jesus' presence as evidenced by our actions is important to God.

God is serious about the behavior of Jesus' followers mirroring the actions of Jesus. In other words God wants people to recognize the Jesus in us.

It's less about who we proclaim we are and more about on whom we pattern our lives.

It's less about what we lose and more about what we learn.

It is less about what we secure and more about what we share.

It 's less about what we think and more about what we teach.

It is less about how we look and more about how we love.

And it is most about knowing that wherever we are, God is there with us, a God that expects us to rest and well as work, a compassionate God that relies on and trusts each of us to be instruments of his compassion and a God that wishes people to recognize the presence of his Son in our behavior.

May we make right, the precious words of that hymn – and they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love, yeah they'll know we are Christians by our love. Amen

