

PENTECOST 8

July 19, 2015

Mark 6:30-44 (different from Pericope)

"Rest for Body and Soul"

Pastor Saul Stensvaag

Sometimes, I'm sure the words of scripture, that we hear read every Sunday, can sound like **meaningless words from a dead book.**

But in our Lutheran tradition, we believe that **the Word of God is a living word – a dynamic word.**

So, whenever we hear God's word read or preached, we should **listen with the anticipation** that **ANYTHING COULD HAPPEN!** ...**Maybe, just maybe, God is speaking to me.** And **maybe that word from God will change my life forever.**

Can I ask you to listen once more to part of our Gospel text? And this time, **expect that the King of the Universe speaks to you here and now** through these words.

The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. 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. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves.

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. When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat." But he answered them, "You give them something to eat."

If this Word from God is indeed living and dynamic, then we need to ask what the central message is, and today, it's twofold: first, that **Jesus has great compassion for people; both** for his **disciples**, and for **people in general**, and second, that **we who call Jesus "Lord"** don't simply receive compassion and care from Jesus.

We're also called to **give the same to others.**

The 12 apostles have just returned from a mission journey. They're **excited** by all that they've experienced, but they're also **close to exhaustion**, and **people are pressing around**, clamoring for attention.

As the text tells us, there were so many people coming and going that the disciples **didn't even have time to eat!**

Isn't this a pretty accurate description of life in the 21st Century? "*No time even to eat.*" It often happens with those who, as disciples of Christ, seek to go the extra mile of service to God and others.

And **I don't mean pastors**. I mean **Christians like you**. I know that **many evenings, some of you who come to committee meetings, or who bring your children to confirmation classes haven't even had time to eat!**

Living **as faithful Christians in the modern world** can often bring about a **bone-numbing weariness**. **We need rest** for our **bodies and souls**.

Jesus knows. **Jesus knows how weary the battle can make you**.

The disciples were tired after their missionary journey. Jesus knows, and he has compassion for them. And **Jesus knows how tired you are**.

So he invites you: *"Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while."* Doesn't that sound wonderful?

Jesus has compassion for us, as he did for his disciples.

But He has **just as much compassion** – maybe even more – for the great crowd of people who are waiting for him when he comes ashore.

"He had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd."

Sheep without a shepherd. The words suggest a scattered, leaderless humanity, without direction or purpose, driven by a desire for something or someone to give meaning and direction to their lives.

Sheep without a shepherd. These aren't **dead words from a dead book**.

They're a **timeless picture of humanity**, reminding us that **no matter how much things change** in our world the **basic condition of human beings before God** is **always and everywhere the same**: WE'RE LOST.

We truly are like **sheep without a shepherd**, wandering off into all sorts of dangerous territory, with **nothing to guide us** but the **twisted values of our world** and our own **self-centered desires**.

But our helpless condition moves Jesus to compassion. And he offers us what we need.

As tired and busy as Jesus was, it would hardly surprise us if he responded to the crowds in irritation.

He might even have wanted to shout, *"Leave me alone! There're just too many of you!"*

But instead, Jesus has compassion on these people. You see, Jesus always has time to minister to the needs of people.

He **doesn't see them as an interruption** to more important business. Rather **they are the reason he has come** to live among us.

Jesus has compassion. Is this what God wants to say to you this morning?

Jesus has compassion for you when you are **burned out as a Christian**.

Jesus **invites you to come away with him to a quiet place and rest a while.** He promises **rest and refreshment for your soul.** This might happen in a quiet time of prayer or here, in worship. Rest for your soul.

Jesus also has compassion for you **when you feel like a sheep without a shepherd** to guide you through the pitfalls and dangers of life.

In his compassion for you, Jesus wants to **speak to you** and teach you many things – **things he knows you need to hear...** things **which can change your life forever.**

Are you listening? Or does His voice **fall on deaf ears?**

Are you listening when He speaks through Scripture? Have you **given him a chance to speak to you** in **Bible Study, in worship, in prayer?**

Listen! He's speaking a living word to you right now! *"Come, and rest a while,"* he says.

JESUS KNOWS YOUR NEEDS. Jesus has compassion for you and wants to give you rest and renewal. So **why not open up to him this morning?** It might surprise you what could happen.

The **overriding message** in this Gospel text is about Jesus' compassion and care for us.

Let that message **penetrate your heart today.** Let it flood you with peace and a sense of well-being.

REST!

Rest in the compassionate love of Jesus.

That's the main message today. **But there's another important message** in these words. It's shown where the disciples tell Jesus to **send the crowds away to buy food for themselves.** Jesus turns to them, knowing very well that they don't have any food, and says, *"You give them something to eat!"*

It **seems like an impossible demand.** The disciples have just returned from an exhausting mission trip. They desperately need rest.

Our youth and their adult leaders will return late tomorrow night from Detroit.

While there, besides the exhilaration of singing and worshipping with 30,000 other young Lutherans, they did some wonderful service projects in some hot weather.

I know they'll be exhausted when they get home. They'll need lots of rest.

I'm certainly not going to ask Kenny to mow our lawn as soon as he gets in the door!

The disciples needed rest after their mission trip, too. They **certainly don't need to be given another difficult job to do.** But that's what Jesus give them. *"You give these 5000 people something to eat!"* he says.

And so they understandably respond by saying, in effect, "*Forget it! We don't have it in us. We don't have the resources to minister to these people.*"

But Jesus surprises them, doesn't he?

He shows them that, despite all evidence to the contrary, **God will supply the resources necessary for the ministry tasks they've been given.**

Do you hear it? I think Jesus is speaking another living word to you here.

When we look at all of the suffering and tremendous need in the world today: in Nepal, or in poor villages in Africa, in the inner-cities of our country, and even in our own families, we're **simply overwhelmed.** There's just so much need.

And to think that as followers of Christ we might be called to do something to respond to those needs **seems like a cruel joke.**

Our natural response is to say, "*I can barely keep my own act together. I just **don't have it in me** to minister to the needs of others right now.*"

But **the voice of Jesus is insistent.** Listen:

"You give them something to eat.

You respond to those needs."

You drive for meals by wheels.

You give to World Hunger.

The very same compassion for needy people that we find so wonderful in Jesus – that very same compassion is what **makes him turn to you and me** and say, "You give the hungry something to eat."

And this gospel text declares that God will provide the resources necessary for the task. We don't need to fret and worry about it. We can do it.

Because the same Jesus who uses us to reach out to the crowds in need, that same Jesus **comes to us daily with compassion**, to offer **strength, forgiveness, and rest.** And **that is enough.**

Amen.

Prayer:

O Lord God, King of the universe; you know that we who come before you today are weary. We need rest. We need compassion. We have a hunger which is greater than the hunger for food.

FEED US TODAY WITH YOUR LIVING WORD, that we may find rest and new energy for doing your work in our world. Use us to minister to all of the sheep without a shepherd whom we encounter in our daily lives. We pray in the name of your Son, who is all compassion. Amen.