

Sermon for Seventh Sunday of Pentecost, July 19, 2009
2 Samuel 7:1-14; Psalm 89:20-37, Ephesians 2:11-22, Mark 6:30-34,53-56
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There are two points Mark wants to make in his Gospel. Jesus came to teach and the messiahship of Jesus is a secret proclaimed by everyone except Jesus. As a writer, Mark is quick to get to the point of his Gospel. He introduces John the Baptist and quickly dispenses with him as if John were just a footnote to the life of Jesus. In Chapter One he briefly mentions John; that Jesus is baptized by John and goes into the Desert; John is arrested and Jesus begins to proclaim (teach) *The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe in the good news.*

Jesus then calls his disciples; goes to the synagogue in the city of Capernaum where the people are astounded by his teaching because, as Mark reports, *he taught as one having authority, and not as the scribes.* He performed what we might call an exorcism, then cured Peter's mother-in-law as well as those who had come to her home to be cured.

Mark is clear that Jesus' ministry is not primarily a healing ministry. The next morning the disciples go looking for Jesus as there are more people to be cured and Jesus tells them *Let us go on to the neighboring towns so that I may proclaim the message there also, for that is what I came out to do.* And Mark records that Jesus *went throughout Galilee proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.*

Jesus then returned to his home in Capernaum and even here his home was filled with people and he was teaching them. After healing a paralytic Jesus went to the seaside where again he taught a crowd who had gathered around him.

Mark has Jesus going from the seaside to the mountains and returning to the seaside and being so busy teaching and healing that he has no time to eat and some of the people are thinking he has lost his mind. Jesus then began to teach in parables to the crowd by the sea..

In Chapter six, after he raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead, Mark reports that Jesus left *that place and came to his hometown* where again he preached but his teaching fell on deaf ears because it was his hometown. Mark also records that Jesus *went*

among the villages teaching. Not only that, he sent his twelve disciples out into the countryside *with authority over unclean spirits.*

As he sent them out he gave them advice not to take more than they needed, and where-ever they stopped, whosoever house it may be, if they were offered hospitality, they were to stay there. While they were gone, John the Baptist was beheaded

What is interesting at this point in this Gospel according to Mark, is that Jesus, knowing his disciples did not fully understand everything he taught them, trusted them to preach the good news. Jesus also acknowledged their God-given power to heal and cast out demons as he turned them loose with permission to fulfill that ministry. They returned excited *and told him all that they had done and taught.* It was time for debriefing; it was time to go off by themselves

Often in our fast paced world many individuals learn their job with on the job training. Sadly, many of them do not have the opportunity to sit back with someone who has seniority and process what it is they are doing, what they are learning in the process, what have they learned about their strengths and weaknesses. There was a time when those who were learning “on the job” had a supervisor who took some scheduled time at least once a week to process the job with the employee and help them through the hoops and loops of their employment. In the medical, teaching, clerical, professions one was often assigned a mentor during the first two to five years. For the most part, this is a lost art in employment today because of our need to learn and move on quickly.

Jesus suggests a time for R&R and they take off for a deserted place along the shore. Unfortunately they are spotted and people knew where they are headed for and, by the time they arrive at their destination, a crowd had already gathered. We can imagine the discussion on the boat as they approach the shore and see the crowd gathering. More than likely Peter would be the first to suggest they turn the boat around and head somewhere else. Others might chime in and suggest to Jesus he needs a rest. Jesus would listen them and then, when they were finished, he would remind them that in ministry the people come first; that their need for time off will just have to be put on hold for a period

of time. As he looked out at the crowd waiting for him *Jesus had compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.*

To have compassion is more than pity and more than empathy. Jesus did not feel sorry for the crowd. Yes, he empathized with them, but more than that, he felt compassion for them. He felt their sense of lost, their sense of pain, their sense of disorientation. Perhaps he had memories of traveling in Egypt and returning from Egypt with his parents. Perhaps he was reflecting on his own maturing years as he sought to determine his course in life. Whatever it was in his life that he could draw upon, Jesus was more than empathetic to this crowd, he had compassion.

One can feel pity for another and not feel compelled to do anything. One can feel empathy for another and still do nothing. But when we feel compassion, it is a sense of feeling-with that person that draws us to them and compels us to take action, to do something rather than complain about the unfairness of the world.

Jesus had compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Sheep without a shepherd are disorientated. They wander aimlessly all over the place. They become lost. More importantly, one could say, they have no sense of their unity, of their community, of their being in one fold or one flock.

Those reading this, or hearing it read to them in first century Christianity would have understood the text completely. The image of sheep was all too familiar and the importance of a good shepherd was also clearly understood. In Samuel we read where David was taken from shepherding his father's sheep to being the shepherd, as it were, as king of Israel. With David as their shepherd, under the direction of Yahweh, of course, the people of Israel would discover that Yahweh would *appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel, and I will give you rest from all your enemies.*

This is Yahweh's concept of compassion. It's an understanding of compassion that causes one to go the extra mile for those in need. It is Yahweh, as the good shepherd,

making sure that his flock, his fold, have a safe place in which to live, and have all that they need.

Yahweh is the true shepherd and he has chosen David as his representative on earth. Psalm 89 points out God's love for David as his earthly shepherd

I have found David my servant, with my holy oil I have anointed him; My Hand will hold him fast and my arm will make him strong. I will make him my first born and higher than any kings of the earth. I will keep my love for him forever and my covenant will stand firm for him. If his children break my commandments, I will punish them....but I will not take my love from him nor let my faithfulness prove false.

These lines from Psalm 89 can be summed up in the words cited in the Gospel after the baptism of Jesus *You are my beloved son with whom I am well pleased.* Jesus is perceived to be in the line of David and as such is understood to be the new Shepherd, a shepherd who knows his sheep, who cares for and has compassion for everyone.

Actions, it is said, speak louder than words. There are those who feel pity for those less fortunate and do nothing beyond saying, "I feel sorry for them." There are those who feel empathy for those less fortunate and they genuinely may want to do something but, for whatever reason, feel stuck. They make statements like, "I wish I knew what to do for them." "I don't think we can do anything." "I wish somebody would do something for those people." And then there are those with compassion. Some are realistic about what can be done and some go to extremes. Regardless, the reality is that it is those with compassion who take the initiative to actively do something for those in need.

As we look at our Baptismal covenant there is a progression of involvement. First we commit to continuing in the apostles teaching and the breaking of the bread; Then we commit to resisting evil and to repent when we fail; We move out to proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ; then we begin to take action; we commit ourselves to seek and serve Christ in all persons loving our neighbor as ourselves; and finally we commit to go out of our way, to strive, for justice and peace among all people and respecting the dignity of every human being.

We cannot do this without compassion. Going out of his way for justice and peace and respecting the dignity of every human being was the mindset of the prophets of old, the mindset of Jesus and it is our commitment in our baptismal covenant.

Let us pray:

“Look with compassion O heavenly Father, upon the people in this land who live with injustice, terror, disease and death as their constant companions. Have mercy upon us. Help us to eliminate cruelty to these our neighbors. Strengthen those who spend their lives establishing equal protection for of the law and equal opportunities for all. And grant that every one of us may enjoy a fair portion of the riches of this land through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.” (BCP 826)