

## Mark 6:30-44

It seems appropriate that these words in Mark 6 are before us here in the middle of July. When many pastors, and others who are God's people, are resting, taking vacations, Jesus' words validate this where He says to His disciples, "*Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.*" But the congregation in Mark 6 is not cooperative. Thousands of them scurry around the lake to the place where Jesus and His disciples come ashore.

It doesn't say in our text, but how do you think the disciples react to this? "Yay! These people really need us. What a privilege!" or "Drat! There truly is no rest for the weary." Likely the second choice, knowing the disciples as we do. But how does Jesus react? One word says it all: "*He saw a great crowd,*" says our text, "*and He had compassion on them.*"

What is compassion? Do we have it? Jesus does. In many places in the Gospels we're told that He had compassion. We think of compassion as sympathy, pity. "My heart goes out to you," we say to someone for whom we have compassion.

But compassion is not a heart thing; it's a gut thing. The Greek word here means a movement in the gut, and not a happy movement. Jesus' gut literally ached. It hurt with a deep stabbing pain. This is how the Scriptures describe the compassion of God.

When you and I feel such compassion we take a Tums or an Alka Seltzer. No, seriously. We do not let our compassion get the best of us. We don't like it when our gut aches. We're not supposed to feel that way and so we take something or see a doctor.

But not Jesus. His three-and-a-half year ministry was one continuous stomach ache. And He brought it on Himself. Instead of retreating when the crowds pressed in on Him, He stayed with them, always teaching them, always caring for them.

And He still has this compassion today. He has it through us. I will never forget, some years ago when I was in Sudan in Africa, watching with open-mouth amazement every morning the people there coming out by the hundreds to the hut where a nurse was stationed. She came with our group from America to bring medicine to these poor people. There was a hospital in the village, but it was simply a building with beds. No doctors, no nurses, no medicine. What would you do, in opening the doors of your hut each morning, and seeing people, men, women, and children, all assembled before you? Every night she was exhausted because she saw and treated every single one of them until the medicine she had brought ran out. Did not her gut ache for these people? Her gut was Jesus' gut. He was having compassion on the Sudanese people through her.

When Jesus' gut aches, He goes into action. Not for Himself to ease the pain; for those upon whom He has compassion. Wherever He went He brought medicine with Him; the medicine of the Gospel. Our text says that Jesus began to teach many things, and after He taught the people, He fed them. Not one person there walked away dissatisfied. And there were over five thousand of them. Jesus gave them all just what they needed because He had compassion on them.

This morning you are the congregation that has gathered together. You have come with your needs, with your burdens, your nightmares, even with your shame and guilt. And Jesus' gut aches for you. He has no less compassion on you than He had on the crowd in Mark 6. And because we are His disciples, His aching gut is felt within us. That's why it's a good thing for us to assemble together. We bear each other's burdens. We share each other's pain. We have compassion for each other. We have the gut of our Lord in doing this.

And when our Lord has compassion, He takes action. He does the same thing here that He did in Mark 6. There He taught the people and He fed them. Here also He teaches us and He feeds us. He satisfies you with His Word into your ears. And He satisfies you with His Sacrament into your mouth. Our worship service is patterned according to what Jesus did, because we sinful sheep of today are no different from the sinful sheep of that day. What He gave to them is what we also need. He meets our needs, as He met theirs, because He acts on His compassion.

But do we? Not always. Too often we act like His disciples back then. "*Send (the people) away!*" they said to Jesus. They were hungry. The day was nearly over. The only logical thing to do was to end this service of teaching and say, "Go and find food to eat."

Sometimes we act this way. Our compassion has limits and boundaries. For some we have compassion, but for others we have disgust. "Why should I ache in my gut with compassion for that one," (we may say to ourselves) "when he chose to do the wrong thing? He's getting what he deserves. I have no compassion for him." Sounds logical. But this is a human way of thinking and acting. It's not from God.

He acts with compassion always. And in no greater way than His sufferings and death on a cross. Could He not have said, "Let these pathetic humans suffer their own fate; it's what they deserve!" But no. His compassion, His aching gut drove Him to the cross for you and me.

That crowd in Mark 6 did not ask for compassion. They were like sheep without a shepherd. Sheep without a shepherd do not ask, plead, or beg, for they do not know their shepherd. They have needs, but they do not know to come running to the shepherd. They have no shepherd. They are without one. This doesn't stop Jesus. For such as these He has compassion. For such wandering, helpless, needy sheep who have no shepherd, His gut aches and He takes action.

You didn't ask Jesus to be your shepherd. He came to you in the waters of your baptism. He chose to love you. His gut hurt for you even before you were born. Two thousand years ago He died for you, bearing your sin, guilt, and shame, so that today you belong to him - your Shepherd who teaches you and feeds you, who satisfies all your needs.

That's compassion. It's what Jesus is. It's why you, my friend, are forgiven...of everything. Your sinful, shameful past does not keep Jesus from having compassion on you. If anything, He has more compassion. The more shame you have; the more affliction; the more you struggle in life (and too often end up losing those struggles), Jesus hurts even more in His gut for you.

And He takes action for you. Isn't that why you are here today? Isn't that why His body and blood is on the altar for you? Isn't that why He has surrounded you with a congregation to hurt in their gut for you? Compassion. It's what your Lord is for you. And it's what He is, through us, for each other. Amen.