

SERMON

JULY 18, 2021

Charles M. Lee

All-news radio stations and cable news channels give highlights of all the news in the world—in 30 minutes or less., the Gospel of Mark follows a similar fast-paced approach to introducing Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, as it highlights the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Coming out of obscurity, this unique God-man preached, performed miracles, and encountered both great popularity and deadly opposition. It's the greatest news story of all time. The author, John Mark, was the son of a Jerusalem widow whose home was a meeting place for early believers. He most likely recorded the events as he heard them firsthand from the disciple Peter. He portrayed Jesus as the suffering servant who came to die. More than 40 percent of Mark focuses on the anguish and sacrifice of Jesus during his final week on Earth. Mark also portrayed Jesus as the Savior of the entire world—Gentiles as well as Jews.

When you heard or read the Scripture Reading today – honestly, what did you get out of it? It's

hard to pin down. These passages leave out the famous stories written between them of the feeding of the 5000 and Jesus walking on water! Why are today's passages pointed out to us for understanding in the Lectionary for today?

The twelve disciples had had an exhilarating, but exhausting, experience. This was the first time they were on their own without Jesus with them. You will remember that they had preached, they casted out demons, they anointed the sick, and they called people to respond to God by changing their lives.

As Jesus listened to each "team" report, he must have been moved by their tender stories of healing children, inspiring people, and boldly witnessing to Jesus. **But the Lord must have seen fatigue in their faces and so, in a gracious moment of concern and compassion for**

their wellbeing, Jesus said to them: “Come away for a while and rest”.

Come away and rest ...what beautiful words ... an invitation to step out of all the pressures and activity of daily life. Rest ... a chance to slow down, to change the pace. Come away for a while and rest.

July is vacation time for many people in this country. I always hope, especially after this long period of hibernation, that people will take some time off to be with family, to travel, to relax, to spend time reknitting the torn fabric of their lives. The hope of escape into the mountains or to the beach can sustain a person during those dark days of occupational drudgery.

But despite the potential that a vacation affords, I know that many do not take any time away. Some argue that it is too difficult to take time off -you have to work twice as hard to get ready to go, and then when you return you have extra hours of work to catch up. They insist that it is not worth it. Others are actually afraid to be away, lest the

people at the top get the idea the company can function very well without them. In a time of down-sizing no one wants to be the unessential person.

When Jesus invited his disciples to go away with him to the deserted place, he was not inviting them to drop out. He made no suggestion that their ministry of witness and compassion was over now. No, he was simply inviting them to pause in a proper manner before continuing to bless and to serve. It was an invitation to observe the proper rhythm of the Christian life. And they accepted that invitation.

They got into a boat and headed off for the first of all Christian retreats!

We need to hear Our Lord's words about the importance of the literal breaking in upon the craziness of life. We need to rest; Jesus tells us today. Our world is a hectic place. With all the miracles of modern technology we are only a cell-phone's ding away from whoever thinks he or she needs us, and we get addicted to being needed. We need

to honor those sacred words posted on the screen before a movie ...
please silences your cell phones!

Today Our Lord calls us to join him in a deserted place, a place where we can be alone ~ not forever, but for a while. He calls us to find that deserted place, from time to time, where there is no Wi-Fi or 3G, 4G or 5G, e-mail or voice-mail, a place where briefly there is no Facebook or Twitter. **In the Gospel today Jesus challenges us to recharge our batteries ... with Him and no one else.**

He calls us to rest for a while. This rest is not laziness or irresponsibility. **We need to rest, or we will be of no use to anyone, especially to God, for if we work like the devil, we will soon be in his employ.**

Rest, relaxation, and vacation are not only God-given gifts; they are God-directed necessities. And, while the rest of the world may think we are a little crazy to stop while they are running ... we will be crazy in just the right way. Remember, the peace of God that passes

all human understanding, will keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God.

Today's passages speak to us, because we have felt like the disciples must have felt—hurried and harried. The needs were great; the crowds were large; and the disciples could not even find time to eat. If busyness was a problem for them, it seems even worse now. Our problem is a world in which experts have engineered out all the breathing room. Our laborsaving appliances fail to save us from laboring—our communications technology fails to bring us together—and our leisure is filled with chores.

And these passages speak to us, because we have felt like the people who came to Jesus. We, too, have been sick in body and sick in spirit—in desperate need of Jesus' healing touch. We, too, have rushed around hoping to find help—begging Jesus that we might touch even the fringe of his cloak so that we might be healed.

Mark doesn't tell us how the disciples respond, but Jesus has compassion for the crowd, because they are **“like sheep without a shepherd” (v. 34)**. Jesus has a sharp tongue for the self-satisfied, but a soft heart for people in need.

Sheep need a shepherd to lead them on safe pathways, to help them to find food, to defend them against danger, to find them when they wander off, and to restore them to the fold.

Teaching (v. 34), feeding (vv. 35-44) and healing (v. 56) show Jesus' concern for people's physical and spiritual welfare, providing a model for ministry that has served the church well through the centuries. Word and sacrament constitute the core of our ministry, but bread and blankets are almost as important.

Do you have compassion for others in need? For yourself? Compassion really means *suffering with* the one who suffers. Compassion is something that you feel in your gut. Compassion is what bubbles up in us when we see someone else experiencing a pain we have experienced

and know all too well. We internalize that pain in the very core of our being.

- Compassion is what someone who has been the victim of bullying feels when they see someone else being bullied.
- It's like the pain of watching someone count out pennies at the grocery store cash register, hoping they won't have to put some item back that they cannot afford, when you can remember what it was like to feel embarrassment creep up *your* neck while someone waited in line for *you* to count out your pennies.
- Compassion is the pain of watching a friend go through a messy divorce when you've been there and done that.
- It is the pain of watching a parent diminish with age, as you become the *caregiver* for the person who always took care of you.

Have Compassion for yourself, too! Jesus set an example for setting boundaries and limits. He said yes, many times, but he also said no many times. **When the demands on him became too great and he found himself physically and spiritually exhausted, he withdrew to a**

private place. He recognized that he needed time to stop, reflect, pray and nourish his inner life. After all, he was God, but he was also human, and along with that came the physical needs of nourishment and rest.

There is an uneasy balance between retreat and meeting people's needs. If we want to be like Jesus, we have to be moved by people's pain and do what we can to ease their pain. At the same time, we must educate them with a clear explanation of the Gospel.

If we want to lead like Jesus, we have to touch and change the lives of those around us. We have to be aware of the needs of those around us and use our resources to meet their needs. We need to have compassion for other people. We must not see people as an interruption. We must see them as an opportunity to reveal God's loving care and compassion to meet their needs. **We have to see people as God sees them-sheep who need a shepherd.**

We need diligence in serving the Lord and diligence in taking time to rest. If we don't take time to rest, we will come apart physically.

Medicine tells us that many of our physical problems are a result of the lack of rest. We will also come apart spiritually if we don't take time for spiritual renewal and time with God.

We need Jesus to save us from ourselves. We need Jesus to save us from evil. Jesus' compassion and authority will help us to get through the storms of life. They will also cast out our sin-filled nature. We will be cleansed and made pure, and we will have access to a God that loves us very much. Jesus is available. His presence is sure. His strength is positive. He fills the emptiness of our lives.

It's not surprising Christ chose to say his final farewell to his disciples who were his family; He did so over a meal, in an upper room, away from the crowds and the demands of his ministry.

Christ made this time of coming away and eating, sacred. He blessed the elements they shared and reminded his disciples of their purpose as his followers and those who in his name would bear the message of hope he had placed in their care. It was a sacred experience, rich in emotion and filled with grace.

When Jesus looks at you and me, he has compassion for us, too. He feels our pain, our sorrow, our frustration, and our worry. He suffers with us in our broken relationships, our need to make ends meet, and our deep desire to be right with God. He sees us running around like sheep without a shepherd, and he calls to us to walk with him, as he walks with us. Jesus knows his purpose, and he gives that same purpose to his followers, and to us.

I close today with the Great Commission to all who believe in God and Jesus his son: **“Go and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teach them all the things I have commanded you,”**.

LET US PRAY. Thank you, Gracious God, for this time with you and with each other. Help us to lean on your strength when ours fails. Equip us to connect with the hurt and the needy doing so with the compassion you have shown to us in your son Jesus. **Give us the wisdom to know when to work for your reign and when to rest from**

our labors. As in all things, call us to come away with you and rest.

Amen.