

Mark 6:30-56

³⁰The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹He 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.

³²And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. ³³Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. ³⁴As 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.

⁵³When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. ⁵⁴When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, ⁵⁵and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

Sermon – July 18, 2021 – 8th Sunday after Pentecost

I am going to talk to you this morning about our Lord's compassion for us, as demonstrated in this morning's Gospel.

But first, a little story about a minister called Dale. His young son had wanted a puppy for months. Finally the family found the right dog, a miniature dachshund whom they named 'Jen'. Jen soon took charge of the household. When she wanted attention, she got it. When she wanted to play, someone stopped and played with her. One night Dale was working late at his desk. He was very busy with 3 funerals one right after the other. But little puppy Jen wanted to be held. Despite the pressing task at hand, Dale moved away from the computer and lost himself in a cuddle with his irresistible puppy.

Just as irresistible as that puppy was, so are we just as irresistible to God. Because of this, we can count on God's response.

What stands out about Jesus in this morning's Gospel, is that he had compassion. He felt for both the inner circle of apostles well-known to him, **and** for all the others whom he didn't know...the poor and sick, pressing in when he himself was tired and hungry.

Did you know that the word for compassion in Greek is also the word for bowels, for one's innards? So the meaning for compassion is a physical feeling of sympathy that starts in the deepest regions of a person's being, a physical reaction. Jesus may have had a sharp tongue for the Pharisees, but he had a soft heart for people in need. He found them irresistible. He seems never put off by interruptions, by peoples' constant need of his healing and teaching. This text affirms his extraordinary availability. It says that we are 'irresistible' to our Lord.

Jesus has compassion for us both as workers with him in ministry as well as compassion for us when we come to him in need.

He invites us, his followers to **“Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.”** There is a great and pressing need for the healing that comes to us from having 'time out'. Jesus recognizes the healing that rest brings and invites the apostles off to do just that. It was an invitation to pause before continuing. It was an invitation to observe the proper rhythm of

the Christian life. The apostles accepted that invitation. They got into a boat and headed off to the first of all Christian retreats. *And God blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy, because on it he ceased from all the work of creating that he had done.*

Genesis 2:3

“The story is told of a wagon train on its way from St Louis to Oregon. Its members were devout Christians, so the whole group observed the habit of stopping for the Sabbath day. Winter was approaching quickly, however, and some among the group began to panic in fear that they wouldn’t reach their destination before the heavy snows. Consequently, several members proposed to the rest of the group that they should quit their practice of stopping for the Sabbath and continue driving onward seven days a week.

This proposal triggered a lot of contention in the community, so finally it was suggested that the wagon train should split into two groups—those who wanted to observe the Sabbath and those who preferred to travel on that day. The proposal was accepted, and both groups set out. One group traveled on the Sabbath, while the other rested on that day.

Guess which group got to Oregon first.

You’re right. The ones who kept the Sabbath reached their destination first. Both the people and the horses were so rested by their Sabbath observance that they could travel much more.

I have a book called ‘Keeping the Sabbath Wholly’ by a woman called Marva Dawn. She was a speaker at our Diocesan Clergy

College some years ago. She was an author, a teacher and a theologian. She taught for a time at Vancouver's Regent Theological College. Sadly she died just a few months ago.

Marva Dawn kept Sabbath herself and encouraged us all in her book to observe it. After all, it is one of the 10 Commandments. Doesn't that mean it's important?

She writes:

...during the...four years, when I was working on my doctorate. Some of my classmates teased me that I would never get my work done if I continued to refrain from studying on Sundays, but invariably I was able to finish my class papers and projects more quickly because my Sundays of rest enabled me to work longer and more effectively the other six days of the week.”

Many of us, in our busy society, have great difficulty with rest time or Sabbath time as some call it. We cannot get into the boat where we get that Peace which begins within and is then lived out into the world. We are neither Supermen, nor Superwomen, nor are we Christ himself. Just for one day, we need to slow down, to let go of our need to fix the world. We need to let the grace of God recharge our batteries and refresh us, for we do not have the stamina of the energizer bunny. Sabbath time is healing and saving as much as the healing of diseases. Some of the biggest costs in health insurance today are for stress-related illnesses...anti-ulcer meds, high blood pressure meds, and anti-depressants.

But if we think about it, Jesus sent no-one out alone. As difficult as it may be for our egos, we are not “the only one who

can' care for people. Jesus is the shepherd, and it is Jesus who works through **all** of us, not just certain ones.

This is summer, which is a kind of Sabbath season, a season which invites us to slow down and to let go a bit. My hope and prayer is that we will all have some rest and relaxation time.

But we take away today above all that 'all who touched his cloak were healed'.

They **"...begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed."** They *begged* him, they were...so needy they had become insistent, frantic at the possibility of being restored from their illnesses. At the risk of overwhelming Jesus by their numbers, they begged just to touch the fringe of his cloak and **all** who touched were healed...isn't that something...? **all** were healed? The fringe of his cloak was probably the fringe or tassels worn by Jewish men in compliance with Torah law to remind them of God's commandments. It suggests that Jesus was an observant Jew, concerned with obedience to Torah law. But above all, he cared deeply...moved to his inner core...compassionate...so that all who sought him...chased him, maybe even hounded him...were healed.

And so we may be assured of this healing today. Our Lord wishes to help us, to heal us with our weakest reaching out for we are irresistible to him. Amen.

A few years back a minister and his wife took their 2 children on vacation.

They put on their swim suits and headed to the hotel pool. They settled in to relax in the whirlpool when a woman approached with her daughter who had multiple physical and mental challenges. The mother's stress was visible as she explained that once a year they made this trip for the daughter, but her husband wasn't able to come this year. The minister's wife, even though she was on vacation, didn't hesitate to tell the mother that she worked with special needs children all the time, and helped get the girl into the pool and then played with her so that mom got a break.

The next day, they did some vacation things. When it was time for the Canada Day fireworks, they picked a spot on the hill next to the hotel. Nearby was a family with 3 small children – 2 girls and a boy. The boy exhibited behaviours that the minister's wife identified as autism confirmed by the parents. They wondered how their boy was going to handle the fireworks, since overstimulation is a challenge for autistic children.

As the show began, the boy became very agitated. He broke away from his mother and came and sat on the minister's lap, where he became calm and began to watch the fireworks. As his mother started to apologize again, the minister told her who he was and that since her son seemed to have chosen him to protect him, he was fine for as long as he wanted to stay. After a brief

moment to consider this, his mother thanked him and went to enjoy the display with the rest of her family.