

2021-07-18 – Rev Esma Collins-Marks

Mark 6: 30-34

When we come to a deserted place, God welcomes us with his healing grace and peace. He renews us and sends us out to share his gifts with the world. When we get tired, we come to God for rest and refreshment, and then the cycle continues.

How many of you have had days where you're rushing from one appointment, event or chore to another without having time to get rest or have a decent meal? How many of you have had days that have been so busy that you didn't have time to cook and instead went and bought a takeaway? It's not surprising, especially considering our fast-paced, hectic lifestyles.

I read recently that over the last three decades, fast food has infiltrated every nook and cranny of American Society. In 1970, Americans spent about \$6 billion on fast food; in 2000, they spent more than \$110 billion. Americans now spend more money on fast food than on higher education, personal computers, computer software or new cars."

Fast food restaurants have an impact on our lives that is hard to overstate. In fact, someone once said that the Golden Arches of McDonald's are more widely recognised than the Christian cross. Part of the problem is that we have trouble setting boundaries in our lives.

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 recognised that he needed time to stop, reflect, pray and nourish his inner life. After all, 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. How we do this is a question each of us has to answer for ourselves because the answer will be different for each of us. The answer will depend on the gifts God has given us.

Jesus displayed his concern for practical matters. Despite the fact that he was tired, he ministered to the needy souls because they needed spiritual leadership. Jesus showed compassion by staying to teach them. Compassion arises within Jesus when he sees the same sign in the crowd that he sees in a flock of sheep without a shepherd. They were lost, hysterical, wandering aimlessly and hopeless. Jesus understood their needs and responded in compassion. We are the same. On our own, we are defenseless. We are not united. Each and every one of us tries to do our own thing. We are vulnerable just like sheep are vulnerable without a shepherd.

Jesus chose to help the people without taking advantage of them. He helped them by teaching them, organising them, speaking for them and feeding them. He taught them many things to build the foundation of truth that would sustain them when life was hard and he was not with them in person.

The people wanted miracles because they believed they could not meet their own needs, but Jesus kept asking them to feed each other. He kept telling them they could meet their own needs in one another and find the fullness of life they sought in one another. They needed to believe in themselves.

We also want miracles today. Sometimes we believe that we can't meet our own needs, but in reality we can meet our own needs in each other. We can find fullness of life when we come together in fellowship and worship. We can believe in ourselves. As the late Pastor Robert H. Schuller once said, "If you can dream it, you can do it."

Jesus doesn't discriminate when it comes to healing. He doesn't sort out easy diseases or desirable people. What he does look for is a show of faith and determination. He does not force healing on anyone nor does he reward those who play games. He even healed the thankless, the

hardened and the selfish. Remember the story of the ten lepers? Jesus healed all of them, but only one returned and gave thanks to Jesus. Jesus set the example for caring and we as members of the church need to follow this example. The church needs to have the same reputation today. The church needs to address both the spiritual and the physical needs of the people. The church needs to be a servant church.

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. The best way to know that we're looking at life the way God does is to consider how we see other people. That's the true test of our spiritual maturity.

Jesus had compassion for the crowd, but he also had compassion for his disciples. His disciples had just returned from a long and exhausting ministry trip, so he told them to come and rest awhile. They didn't have time to eat. Discipleship has to strike a balance between service and renewal. Without this balance, the stress can be debilitating.

All of us need time alone with Christ. Only he can heal and renew our tired bodies. This is especially true because of modern technology. We have instant access to one another, but we can't escape this access. We need to take a Sabbath or a sabbatical from technology just like we need to take a Sabbath and spend time with God. Our Christian life is a marathon, not a sprint. We need to have endurance to reach our heavenly rest. 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.

When we come away to our own deserted places, we are renewed and refreshed by God's love. God is with us in our joys and our trials. God will

be with us to the end. Jesus looks on us with compassion as he teaches us that we belong to him. We can go on in our daily lives and share God's love and truth.

Jesus means compassion. He knows what we need. We need Jesus to save us from ourselves. We need Jesus to save us from evil. We need Jesus to do more for us than what we hope or imagine that he ought to do in any given situation. 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. We serve a compassionate God. Amen.