

Season after PENTECOST

Prayer

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Collect of the Day

Heavenly Father, though we do not deserve Your goodness, still You provide for all our needs of body and soul. Grant us Your Holy Spirit that we may acknowledge Your gifts, give thanks for all Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Scripture Readings

Psalm 23
(antiphon v. 6)
Jeremiah 23:1-6
Ephesians 2:11-22
Mark 6:30-44

Hymns

Hymn of the Day – 644
Other Hymns – 711 (OT, G), 912 (E),
510 (G, E), 625 (G)

We give thanks to You, heavenly Father, for Your compassion shown in Christ Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep and the righteous Son of David. Keep us trusting at all times in Your right hand, in whom true joy and satisfaction are found. Lord, in Your mercy; hear our prayer.

We give thanks to You, heavenly Father, that You have built Your one Holy Church on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Himself as our cornerstone. Grant unity to Your Church on earth through the work of Your Spirit and the faithful proclamation of Christ's reconciling cross. As You tore down the dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile in Christ, so heal all divisions between people and grant that Your Church, which consists of people from every tribe and race and language, may be one here on earth as it is before Your throne above. Lord, in Your mercy; hear our prayer.

We give thanks to You, heavenly Father, that You have brought us from many families into the household of God. Continue to bless all Christian homes, and grant that fathers and mothers may faithfully lead their children by word and deed to call upon You as Father. Lord, in Your mercy; hear our prayer.

We give thanks to You, heavenly Father, for our nation and its leaders. We ask Your blessing on those who serve in civil office, that we may enjoy good government in accord with Your commandments. Help us to live in service to our neighbours while here, mindful that our true citizenship is in heaven. Lord, in Your mercy; hear our prayer.

We give thanks to You, heavenly Father, for Your constant care and all we need to support this body and life. Attend in mercy to those in need among us [especially _____]. Free them from dismay and fear by the certainty that Christ is their righteous-ness. Lord, in Your mercy; hear our prayer.

All these things and whatever else You know that we need, grant us, dear Father, for the sake of Your beloved Son who died and rose again and who now lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God forever. Amen.

Season after **PENTECOST SERMON**

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (Proper 11) July 18, 2021

Sermon Text: Mark 6:30-44

'Fed By Jesus In A Desolate Place'

It's summer time . . . time to 'get away from it all.' You have been working hard all year long. You need to get away – away from work, away from the regular hum-drum routine of life. So you make a quick plan to head to the beach. This is gonna be nice. But even the best laid plans can quickly unravel, as Jesus' disciples found out in today's Gospel Reading.

Now, Jesus did not really need to 'get away from it all.' He took on human flesh and was born of the virgin Mary in order to get close to it all. Though He did become tired like any other human being, He had the will to keep going, keep loving, keep showing what God's desire is toward all people. He is God in the flesh and so has divine stamina.

But His disciples were not divine. They were mere men . . . sinful men, to boot . . . even though they had been sent out on a divine mission. They came back from their preaching and healing trip excited but tired. They had so many people around, coming and going, that they didn't even have time to eat. They needed a 'debriefing' time . . . some rest and relaxation, a time to regroup, to 'get away from it all'. And so, Jesus, who knows what everyone needs, says to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while." (Mark 6:31 ESV).

Now, unlike us, they didn't have to worry about traffic wrecking their plans. They simply got into their boat and it was clear sailing across the lake. But that, however, did not mean they 'got away from it all.' So we read: "Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them." The desolate place, their rest and relaxation location, was packed.

It's surprising they even found a place to dock their boat. And these were not just fellow vacationers seeking relaxation. These were people with needs, people who heard something in Jesus' preaching that they wanted or needed, and they were willing to travel on foot a long way in order to get more of it. Jesus had taken His disciples to 'get away from it all,' to go to a desolate hideaway, to regroup and restore and refresh. But it wasn't going to happen.

But unlike us, Jesus was not ticked off. He was not upset with the imposition of the crowds. He didn't ask His Father why He couldn't provide Him with just a bit of space and time for some R &R. He didn't see people as a problem from whom He wanted to get away. Just the opposite. He had "compassion on them," our text says. And this is the 'guts-wrenching', empathy kind of compassion for them in their need. It's not mere 'pity' but a deep, heart-felt love and concern for them. And so, when He sees the crowd He doesn't regard them as a nuisance or a disruption of His plans. Instead, He has compassion on them in a twofold way.

First, Jesus calls it like it is – they were "like sheep without a shepherd." They were not just 'unfulfilled' . . . needing to more free, or to 'find themselves', or to discover their true identity. No, they were lost; shepherd-less sheep. Jesus saw through to the heart. And He still does. No matter what we pretend on the outside, to make ourselves look 'OK'; Jesus sees that we are all shepherd-less sheep without Him.

And second, Jesus responds with what they needed; as we read: "And he began to teach them many things." Yes, Jesus simply taught them. Oh, they might have thought they had lots of other, more pressing, needs. Maybe they wanted better jobs, or more equal distribution of wealth, or more obedient children, or happier lives, or they didn't want the Romans around anymore. We might think we have pressing needs, too. We pray health for the sick each week. We ask help from God for the wanderers, the homeless, the threatened. We seek favourable days in our lives as well.

But the one thing needful, as Mary knew and Martha found out, is what Jesus will teach you. And His teaching, especially here, is not a list of how-to's, of ways to self-improvement, or a prescription for how you can live your best life now. None of that, after all, would be of help to shepherd-less sheep. It would just make them more helpless and more hopeless.

Instead, Jesus will teach you of Himself, the Good Shepherd who has come – as Jeremiah promised – to shepherd His sheep Himself. The "many things" Jesus

taught were about Himself. Notice that in the Creeds – the summaries of His teaching that we confess – we don't talk about us. We confess him. Jesus is the incarnate God, born of Mary. Jesus is the One who suffered for all under Pontius Pilate. Jesus was crucified; Jesus died; Jesus was raised from the dead. Jesus is coming again to judge and to save. And it is this Jesus is who you need, what you need; regardless of what you think you need. He is the Good Shepherd who has come to lay down His life for the shepherd-less sheep.

And take notice, the desolate place was not really so desolate after all. It was full of people. But in a way, however, it was desolate . . . desolate because these people were like sheep without a shepherd. And today as well. We don't always realize how desolate our world, our space, our place, is. Oh, sometimes we do realize it – when we are in pain, when we are unwell, when we are grieving, when nothing can brighten the gloom or pierce the darkness that surrounds us.

But even when we don't realize it, it's still desolate. Hear what St. Paul says: "Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." That's not a pretty picture, is it? And no matter how you dress it up, no matter how many friends or nice things or good experiences you paint into the picture . . . having no hope and being without God in the world is being in a desolate place, and in a very bad way.

"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ," the apostle adds. And this is the main thing of the many things Jesus taught to those crowds, to us, to the world; so Paul continues: "He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near . . . So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God."

Through the sound of Jesus' human words and ordinary vocabulary on that lakeshore, God was speaking peace and deliverance into people's lives. Only through the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ do we have access to God. And do you know what? Jesus still has no need for Himself to 'get away from it all.' He is not seated at the Father's right hand because He wants some space! He was and remains right now 'God with us' in His Word, His Baptism, His Absolution, and richly in His Supper – 'God with us' and God for us . . . for you and for me.

And Jesus' compassion does not end. As the psalmist declares, "His steadfast love endures forever." Our compassion, however, is often not cut from the same cloth. When Jesus' disciples realized that it was late, and that they had thousands of

people in front of them in that ‘nowhere’s-ville place’ – they got nervous. You don’t want to face thousands of hungry faces. Their suggested solution was not exactly considerate and kind-hearted: “Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.” Nor was it very practical. After all, how many fast food joints were these folks going to find in that desolate place?

But Jesus didn’t sound very practical to them either: “You give them something to eat. And they said to him, ‘Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?’” They didn’t have that amount of cash on them; and even if they did, they did not want to spend it on this crowd. And even then, it would not have fed them all anyway.

Like the disciples, we, too, just don’t get it. We rely on ourselves, our gifts, our resources, our strength, our stamina, our patience, even our limited compassion . . . and so we fail. Like them, we too need to repent and receive . . . that is, give up our strength and ability, for only Jesus can really take care of things.

“And Jesus said to them, ‘How many loaves do you have? Go and see.’ And when they had found out, they said, ‘Five, and two fish.’” (Mark 6:38 ESV). What we have is what Jesus has given; and what Jesus has given is what we have. And do you know what? It is enough. The compassion of Jesus is enough – His compassion for us and to us . . . and, yes, His compassion also through us. So St. Paul urges us in Colossians: “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.”

And so, Jesus puts compassion ‘on’ His disciples. He tells the crowd to sit in groups of fifties and hundreds. And, as we then read, He took “the five loaves and the two fish, [and] he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all.” Jesus’ compassion was for body and soul, soul and body. He taught and he fed. And in the same way, He feeds us in His teaching and teaches us in His feeding. And it is always enough. “They all ate and were satisfied,” so we read . . . so much so, that there were even leftovers.

And do you know what? There will always be leftovers, because Jesus’ compassion is not only enough, but more than enough . . . even and especially in desolate places. Because Jesus is the Good Shepherd who sits us down on the green grass, who prepares His table before us, who will make our cups run over with His mercy . . . it is enough. And we will never . . . at long last . . . need to get away from it all; for His leftovers will feed you for eternity. In the name of Jesus. Amen.