

TENDING THE FLOCK

July 21, 2024

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First Lesson; Jeremiah 23:1-6

Psalm of the Day; Psalm 23

Second Lesson; Ephesians 2:13-22

Sermon Text; Mark 6:30-34

The text we will look at today is taken from Mark, chapter six, verses thirty through thirty-four.

The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to Him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while.” For there were so many people coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat. They went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. But many people saw them leave and knew where they were going. They ran there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. When Jesus stepped out of the boat, He saw a large crowd. His heart went out to them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. He began to teach them many things.

These are your words. Heavenly Father lead us in the way of truth.
Your Word is truth.

Amen

There is something called Irritable Bowel Syndrome. There is something called a Bowel Obstruction. That means there is something wrong with your bowels. Your bowels are your intestines

- your large intestines, and your small intestines. Sometimes we call our bowels our 'gut'. We might say, "*Something's going on with my gut.*"

Sometimes we use that sense more broadly, and it is not just your intestines, but it could be your stomach, and it could be your whole digestive tract. We call that your Gastrointestinal Tract.

Sometimes there is something going on with our gut. We may call that our Innards. Sometimes the word 'innards' can refer, not just to our digestive tract, but to all of our internal organs. For example, our heart, lungs, our kidneys, liver, our stomach, and our intestines. The technical word for all of our internal organs is 'Viscera'.

It is interesting that we use our viscera, or internal organs, to describe our feelings, or our emotions. For example, we may say, "*You just melted my ____*" my what? My heart. Or, "*I love you with all my heart.*" That is an organ. Or, have you ever heard somebody say, "*I am going to vent my spleen!*"? Now, what does that mean? Well, you are talking about an organ, but it is a way of talking about getting rid of your frustrations. Or, maybe something really startling happens, or something tragic, and you say, "*That was like a punch in the gut.*" So, we use our visceral, our organs, to express our emotions, and our feelings to talk about them. Sometimes we say, "*You had a visceral reaction.*" It is not an intellectual reaction you had, but you had this visceral reaction. Something happened, and internally you could even feel it in your organs, this emotion that was being expressed internally. A visceral reaction.

We want to be careful when we talk about our visceral reactions that we don't mix up the wrong organ with our feelings. For example, it would be very proper to write a valentine's card to someone you love and say, "*I love you with all my heart.*" You probably would not hit the right cord if you wrote, "*I love you with all my bowels.*" Which gets me to a Bible passage. I am going to read something out of King James English. King James sometimes is translated very

literally. I want you to listen to this passage, 1 John 3:17. This is King James, so bear with me.

“But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?”

My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”

What does that mean, *“Don't shut up the bowels of your compassion.”*?

Here is another passage that is taken from Colossians 3:12.

“Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies....”

It is using bowels to express some good emotion that we have toward people.

Did you know that in the King James English, when Joseph saw all of his brothers for the first time, after they had sold him into slavery, it says when he saw them, it technically says, **“...his bowels did yearn upon his brother...”** That is a way of saying he was overcome with emotion for them.

In fact, there is a Bible verse that is an example, in Psalm 25:6.

“Remember, O LORD, Thy tender mercies and Thy lovingkindness...”

In my King James English beside **tender mercies** there is a footnote that takes you over to the side. It says technically, in Hebrew,

“Remember, O LORD, Thy bowels and Thy lovingkindness.”

That's all the way of saying that in The Bible, generally speaking, the heart is connected with the emotion of love. The bowels are connected with the emotion of compassion. It is seeing somebody in need, in trouble, and being motivated to help them, somehow.

The reason I bring that up is because in today's scripture reading, there is a word. It says,

“Jesus looked out over the crowd

and He had compassion on them.”

Technically in Greek, it says, and uses the word 'intestines'.

“...He had bowels...”

In other words, He had this visceral reaction, this deep visceral reaction, when He looked out over the crowd, seeing this deep need, and being motivated to do something about it.

We are going to look today at Jesus' compassion. I am going to call it His bowels of mercy, this visceral reaction the Lord has toward us in our need.

At first I am going to look at it in a little way, and then I am going to look at it in a bigger way.

In a little way, let's set the context of what happened today in our scripture reading. It said the disciples came, and **“reported to Him everything they had done and taught.”** They had just been out. They had been sent out, two by two, on missionary journeys. They had preached and taught. They had driven out demons. They had healed people. And now, they had finally come back, and they were reporting to Jesus what had happened to them.

We are assuming they were probably exhausted by this mission trip. In addition to that, not only were they exhausted, and now back trying to tell Jesus what had happened, but they were also overwhelmed. The Bible says, the passage says,

“For there were so many people coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat.”

So, they were exhausted. They were overwhelmed with all of these needs that people are coming to them with.

And then, we also know this. They had just gotten news that John the Baptist had died. He had been beheaded. He was a dear friend of theirs. So, they were probably struggling with grief.

Here you have these men who were exhausted, overwhelmed, hungry, and struggling with deep feelings of grief.

Jesus, in His compassion, in His compassion saw His disciples in

need. In His heart He was motivated to do something about it.

What did He do? He said, "*Let's get away to a quiet place, and get some rest.*"

So, they all got into a boat, and they sailed four miles across The Sea of Galilee. When they got to the other side, the crowd had already beaten them there. Immediately, this crowd had needs.

So, did the disciples get the rest, the quiet place that Jesus said, "*I am going to take you to a quiet place.*"?

They did. Do you know what that quiet place was? It was that four miles in the boat with Jesus. It was just the disciples and Jesus. He was with them. They got away from the crowds. They got away from the pressures. They got away from their exhaustion, because they had time to just rest in the boat with Jesus. And certainly, Jesus must have been talking to them, and comforting them.

In a way, all of us, I am sure many of us, have been dealing with exhaustion. You have been dealing with feeling overwhelmed, with situations in life. You have been grieving something that is going on in your life, whether it is your own sin, or some loss you have had.

Isn't it amazing that Jesus, in His compassion, has instituted what we call The Third Commandment. It is a day of rest. Here you are.

You are 'in the boat', away from all of those, (*just for a time*), away from all of those concerns. You are here 'in the boat' with Jesus, and His disciples. He is giving you spiritual rest through His Word.

So, the disciples got into the boat. What we know is The Sea of Galilee is small enough that you can see a boat from the shore, no matter where it is. A boat can't get away from you. And, this crowd saw Jesus sailing, and they followed. They went eight miles, while Jesus and His disciples sailed four miles. And here is this massive crowd. We know there were five thousand men, plus women and children. So, maybe fifteen to twenty thousand people gathered on the shore, just waiting for Jesus and His disciples to get off that ship. As soon as Jesus and His disciples got off of the ship, and Jesus saw

the crowds, (*this is where this word comes in*), Jesus had compassion. The words of visceral, visceral reaction. Jesus had bowels of mercy. He saw these people who had all gathered there, and He was so deeply moved by what He saw, that He wanted to do something about it. What did He see? What was He so moved about that He felt this visceral emotion? The Bible tells us.

**“He had compassion on them,
bowels of mercy, because (*here it is*)
they were harassed, and helpless
like sheep without a shepherd.”**

Now, sheep without a shepherd takes us back to The Old Testament. In The Old Testament the people of Israel were referred to as God's flock, His sheep. God, of course, is the Shepherd who watches over them. In The Old Testament God assigned religious leaders, spiritual leaders who were to serve as the shepherds, the under shepherds to that flock. What we discover in The Old Testament (*Pastor Van Kampen read a great example of that in Jeremiah*) what we discover those shepherds, those under shepherds were terrible shepherds, by in large. They would not take spiritual care of the sheep that were in their hands. They neglected them. They misled them. They told them false doctrine. They even led them into all kinds of sin. So, these false shepherds totally, totally endangered the flock.

In Jesus' day the same thing was going on, the same thing. Here were all of these spiritual leaders in Israel, and they were to be the shepherds of God's flock, but what had happened? They had put the flock in such terrible danger. We know they taught basically nothing but law. There was no Gospel. There was no good news. The law they taught were heavy burdens that they placed on people's shoulders. “*You have to do this.*” “*You have to do that, if you want to have God's favor.*” The burdens were super heavy. Jesus tells us the religious leaders did not lift a finger to try to help

them. We know the religious leaders would make people, who knew they fell in to sin, feel so rotten, and so guilty.

They would say, **“Jesus eats with sinners, and tax collectors.”**

And, that was like it was a terrible thing. They made people feel so burdened, and so guilty for their sin, but they gave them no relief.

No relief, whatsoever. These people, well, Jesus looked at their souls, these twenty thousand souls in front of Him. He knew these people were like sheep without a shepherd.

What happens to a sheep without a shepherd? Well, it dies. It dies.

And Jesus saw all of these souls, and He knew, *“They are in grave danger of dying for eternity.”*

So, you can see why the Bible says, **“He looked out over the crowds, and He had bowels of mercy.”** He had this visceral, visceral emotional reaction for the trouble they were in, and then motivation to do something about it.

Now, I am going to put it 'on pause' for a second. You and I all know people, we all know people who are like sheep without a shepherd. And, left to their own, what happens to sheep without a shepherd? They die. And, I mean, they die eternally. Do we have that same visceral, bowels of compassion, when we know somebody who is headed in that direction? All of us have to admit, *“There have been times when I did not have compassion on somebody, when I should have.”*

We are all sinners. Even then, isn't it so comforting to know that Jesus has bowels of compassion for you and me? He has absolute bowels of compassion.

Now, with this crowd of (*what?*), 20,000 people, Jesus viscerally felt for them. He determined in His heart that He was going to help.

So, what did He do? The Bible says,

“He began to teach them many things.”

So, how did He help this whole crowd that was headed in the wrong direction? He began to teach. Although The Bible does not tell us

what He taught, (in Luke it says He taught about the Kingdom of God), but I am sure He knew, I am sure He knew in that crowd there were people there who were very, very troubled about their sins. And, there were people there who didn't know what is God's heart? What are God's bowels toward them, when it comes to their sin? One of my favorite stories Jesus told, (*and I am sure He would have conveyed something like this to the crowd*), is the story of the Prodigal Son. That is the story of a young man who had fallen into deep sin. He finally came to repentance, and he comes walking back to his father. In his heart he doesn't know how his dad is going to take him back. He knows he has done wrong. He knows he is in deep trouble, and he knows he needs help. But, he does not know if his dad is going to love him, and care about him, so he just comes as a beggar. He is going to say this. He is going to say, **“Father, I have sinned against heaven, and I have sinned against you. I don't deserve to be called your son. I don't deserve that. But, just make me like one of your hired servants.”** He thought, *“Maybe, maybe then Dad will take me back.”*

Well, Jesus said that as that young man was coming, his father saw him from a distance. Then, Jesus said, **“His father had compassion.”** Only the word Jesus uses is the Greek word, **“He had bowels of mercy.”** This dad was so viscerally moved by seeing his son in need, who was sorry, and so desperately wanted to be loved by his father. That father was moved by bowels of compassion. It says he ran, and threw his arms around his son. There was nothing but complete and total forgiveness. That is the type of message that Jesus began to teach the crowd that gathered in front of Him. He was gathering His sheep. Just like He gathers you and me with that same message. He comforts us so deeply with His (*I am going to use it*) bowels of compassion, His visceral, visceral concern for our need. Think about God's love, and what His heart, and His bowels of compassion caused Him to

ultimately do. He ultimately went to the cross, and paid the price for all of our sins.

Well, that is the Shepherd we have. That is **The Good Shepherd**. Now, I am going to get back to how that affects us. I am going to get back to this passage from 1 John, chapter three, verse seven. You know, you know and I know the bowels of mercy He has had for us, and does have. Here is what it says.

“But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?”

In other words, if you know someone in need, especially deep spiritual need, and you shut up your bowels of compassion, and you are not viscerally moved by that, it says, *“How does God's love dwell in you?”*

May God cause all of us to have hearts of love, and bowels of compassion, especially to people who are like sheep without a shepherd. Do you know somebody, do you know somebody who does not have The Good Shepherd, who is straying away from The Good Shepherd, who maybe does not have a church where they can come, and hear the Shepherd's voice, or who does not have a pastor? (Pastors are not The Good Shepherd, but the word '*pastor*' does mean '*shepherd*'.)

I love our synod's little theme this year. Our synod is asking the question, **“Do you have a pastor?”** If you have a friend, or a loved one that is like a sheep without a shepherd, and they are in some kind of trouble (*They are sick. They are lonely. They have lost someone*), what a great question, moved by the bowels of compassion to ask them, *“Do you have a pastor? Let me get you one.”* Talk to Pastor Van Kampen, and myself. Invite them to hear about Jesus, and His Word. Of course, you can tell them, too.

The bottom line is this. May God give us hearts of love, and bowels of compassion.

Amen

Now, may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts, and our minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Amen