

July 22, 2018

Mark 6: 30-34, 53-56

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“It Never Ends”

We're in the middle of summer and some say it's the right time to lighten the mood. After all, this is the season when we think sunshine, picnics, waterparks, vacations, food from the grill, longer days, and, if we're lucky, a slower pace. So, maybe this is the time to lighten it up. Some say we should do exactly that in the church, keep it light. Recently, in an article by a preacher intended for preachers, the author suggests those of us who do the work of preaching should realize that people don't want to go too deep on summer Sundays. He said for best results keep it easy and light. Like a cool drink on a warm day, he believes sermons should be refreshing this time of year. I get what he is saying. None of us come to church hoping to be weighed down. Yet, we know the message of the bible can be heavy, at times. Maybe we should concentrate on words of scripture that don't require as much reflection. What's wrong with going easy? In fact, why can't our theme verse be the one we find in the Gospel of Matthew, the 11th chapter, "Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden," Jesus says, "for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matt. 11:28) It seems that even Jesus wants to lighten it up. Yes, faith lifts us out from under the burden of the day, but here's the thing. Jesus' ability to lift us up makes its greatest impact when we are first honest about what presses us down. In the beginning, the bible says, God sent light into the darkness. This light of God's is at its most beautiful when we recognize how much we need rescued from whatever darkness overwhelms us. And so, with the risk of being too heavy this morning, we ready ourselves for the message from Mark's Gospel. Mark's words point to the difference Jesus makes in the face of all that ails us. This is the good news and we're most ready to hear it when we are not afraid to name the depth of our need. Even on a summer Sunday morning, we can deal with the truth, even when it may be a bit heavy to carry.

Here's the situation. The disciples gathered with Jesus on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. They had just returned from a mission trip. I say a mission trip because Jesus had shared his power with the disciples and sent them out into the world to heal, to cast out demons, and to spread the word that now is the time to live within God's kingdom. The disciples come back from their mission to tell Jesus all they have done. We can imagine the excitement they felt. It must have been amazing to realize what God was doing through them and Jesus was certainly pleased by the report but he also knew the twelve were weary from their work. Always able to see into the heart of a person, Jesus says to them, "Let's go away to a quiet place so we can rest." Have you ever been so tired your body literally ached with the weariness? I mentioned that summer is a lighthearted time of year but it also brings opportunity for manual labor. The other day I went after some landscaping around our house that was growing shaggy and wild. I decided to use the hand shears instead of the power ones. I started to work on the bushes, clip - clip - snip - snip, working the blades back and forth. The job wasn't that tough, at least that's what I thought as I cut away the growth and reshaped the hedges toward a better look. I thought, "This work isn't bad at all." But later that evening, it felt much different when I went to get up from my chair. By the way, I've always said I'll know I'm getting older when I have a favorite chair. That's where I was, in my favorite chair, and the process of trying to get up revealed how tough my earlier work in the yard had been. Bending over with those shears, using muscles in my arms and back that I don't regularly use, it took its toll. The weariness seemed to go to the bone. "We need rest," Jesus said. So he pulled the disciples back and looked for a place where they could regain their strength. It's what the disciples needed. It's just that the crowds had other ideas.

Mark paints the picture for us. He says the crowds went ahead of them and were already waiting for Jesus and the disciples. What was to be a quiet place becomes a crowded place. The need for rest was overwhelmed by the needs of the people. Each one in that crowd looking for some way to touch the power in Jesus so the weight of their lives would be lifted. The saying comes to mind, "There is no rest for the weary." This sounds like it come from the bible but it doesn't. When we say "no rest for the weary" it's a twist from the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah said, "There is no rest for the wicked." Now, that will weigh us down if we stop to think about it. Somewhere along the way we've changed the words to reflect our experience. Life can make us weary. Rest can be fleeting. We work our way through hard experiences all of the time. Not long ago I connected with a family whose loved one received the hard news of a difficult health prognosis. One of them said, "We are trying to come to grips with this. We are completely overwhelmed." Life can be heavy. Sometimes we get weighed down and this is the heaviness we are willing to be honest about today. Even when we regain our strength, even when we're stronger than we were before, we know the next difficult situation may sap our energy. "We need rest," Jesus said. But the crowd keep pressing in. They just kept coming, and Jesus and the disciples could not stop doing the work of God.

So, is this where all of this leaves us, worn out, overwhelmed, and bone weary? God will not leave us there. If we keep our eyes upon Jesus, we find an answer to our weariness. Jesus points the way to a renewed capacity to

do the work of God. Mark writes that when they came to what they hoped would be a quiet place and saw the crowds with their all of their need Jesus looked upon them with compassion. Christ's compassion is the answer to our weariness. Compassion renews one's heart. Compassion is like a super food for the soul. Think about it. We know Jesus had limitations. He must have worn down. Jesus longed for rest, but when he looked at those in need with compassion he was re-energized in his mission to heal, and to lift up, and to save. Compassion is like a direct shot of God power. Compassion is the energy drink of faith. Jesus saw the crowd through compassionate eyes and the weariness in him faded away. Compassion was the conduit that filled Jesus with God, so much so that it was true what he said about himself. His yoke was easy and his burden light.

Along the way we've known folks who get disappointed with the church. They say things like, "I'm just not being fed" or "I'm not getting my needs met" or "It's just not relevant to me anymore with all the things I'm juggling in life." Jesus moves us away from only seeing what we need and helps our eyes see the world through compassion. When we see others through the filter of compassion it is impossible to stay focused on ourselves. Compassion brings an openness to be with others in their suffering. If we should become preoccupied with meeting the hunger of our own needs, Jesus places a heaping serving of compassion in front of us. When the compassion of Christ is our way we become renewed in our commitment to share what God makes possible in the lives of others. If we ever grow cynical, if our hearts get hardened because the needs of the world never stop, and if we feel like giving up because we're convinced there is no way to make a difference anyhow, Jesus comes with compassion to renew and empower us in this faith. It never ends, the needs of the world but God's compassionate love never ends either. Nothing is too heavy when we are filled with the compassion of Christ.

A majority of the world's adult population wears eyewear of some kind, either to shade the sun or for corrective reasons or just to make a fashion statement. The gospel wants us to see the need of others through the lens of compassion. In Christ we see their suffering, we acknowledge their need, and we recognize what God has given to us that we can offer to them. Expressing compassion is a direct way to be in partnership with Christ. Think about some of the most difficult people to get along with in your life. How do you usually see them? Now, put on the lenses of compassion. See them now as Christ sees them. Can't you feel a renewed energy to change the pattern? With the filter of compassion in place feel yourself empowered with a capacity to be more loving, more tolerant, more patient, and more forgiving. The burden can be easier. The darkness can become light.

Compassion took a tapped out Savior and a group of worn out disciples and made them into an ongoing expression of God's healing power. How will compassion connect you to what God is doing in your life?