

**Weekend of Sunday, July 22, 2018**  
**9<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 16/Proper 11/Year B**  
**Primary Text: Mark 6:30-34, 53-56**  
**Sermon Title: “Caring for Others AND Ourselves”**

**Theme**

*When Jesus sent his disciples out to teach and heal, they ministered among large numbers of people. Their work was motivated by Christ’s desire to be among those in need.*

**Text**

<sup>30</sup>The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. <sup>31</sup>He 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. <sup>32</sup>And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. <sup>33</sup>Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. <sup>34</sup>As 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.

<sup>53</sup>When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. <sup>54</sup>When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, <sup>55</sup>and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. <sup>56</sup>And 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

This week's gospel reading is a semi-continuous reading, meaning the reading is not contiguous; there are verses left out. And while that might be confusing enough, I'm actually going to do a little review of chapter six of Mark's gospel account because it establishes an interesting pattern.

You may even find it helpful to open the pew Bible in front of you so that you can visually follow along.

First let me remind you that there are sixteen chapters in Mark's gospel and we are in Chapter Six so we are nearer the beginning of Jesus' public ministry than we are the end.

- :1-6**      **Jesus in his own hometown**
- :7-13**     **Jesus sends out the Twelve**
- :14-29**    **Jesus hears of the beheading of John the Baptizer**
- :30-34**    **Return of the Twelve**
- :35-46**    **Jesus feeds the 5000 (men)**
- :47-52**    **Jesus walks on water**
- :53-56**    **Jesus continues ministry**

In verses 1-6, we have the story of Jesus in his hometown of Nazareth where he was marginally effective because of their inability to see one of their own as the Son of God, and as a result they lacked faith in him thereby eliminating for themselves the potential to receive a miracle. We dealt with that story on July 8<sup>th</sup>.

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And while this frustration might have caused others to reconsider their career choices, it didn't seem to have set Jesus back. Instead he commissioned and

instructed the Twelve. Mark refers to the Twelve as "apostles," the noun form of the Greek verb *apostello*, which means "to send;" in other words, these Twelve were *sent ones*. They had a specific purpose in being sent off.

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The next section, verses 14-29, was last week's Gospel Reading and covered the period while the disciples, now apostles, were away from their Lord Jesus on their first missionary journey. What was Jesus doing while the Twelve were on their first missionary journey? That is a great question. I have no idea. Mark doesn't say, but based on the pattern he himself demonstrated and was recorded in scripture in several places,

- Retreat
- Reflect
- Commune with the Father
- Re-engage ministry

I am going to speculate that he retreated, reflected, and communed with the Father, so that he could re-engage ministry.

Now I hope that you are able to pay attention in spite of all the flipping of slides while we go hoppy-skippy through Mark's gospel, because I need you to remember that pattern, because it is the most important point I am going to make.

In last week's Gospel Reading, Jesus was alone when he heard the news about the beheading of John the Baptizer. John was known to Jesus; they were cousins. Jesus and John both knew what the story was, how they were partners in the bringing of the Gospel. John was the forerunner for the Messiah. Jesus was the Messiah. They were like socks and shoes; directions and destination; it was God's plan that we wouldn't have one without the other.

Beheading would have been a brutal way for anyone to be killed, but John was an important person in Jesus' public and personal life. Most of us would have had some trouble getting by that kind of a loss. And it's not that Jesus didn't. Mark nor any of the other gospels say, but once again, I am going to speculate that Jesus got through it the same way he did all the other episodes of his life. He retreated, reflected, and communed with the Father, to re-engage ministry.

- Retreat
- Reflect
- Commune with the Father
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I imagine that Jesus grieved a while, maybe even prayerfully consulted his Father the way he did in the Garden of Gethsemane as he pondered his own Passion, but then he got back on task. No matter what happened Jesus did not lose sight of his objective.

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Verses 30-34, the first part of our Gospel Reading today, is the story of the return of the Twelve

The Twelve returned energized from all that they had been able to do; preaching and teaching, laying hands on the sick and healing them. That would get me pretty excited! But Jesus, though perhaps still grieving the loss of his cousin John, was already re-engaging ministry by himself. Mark wrote that, <sup>31b</sup>"many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat."

So Jesus suggested that they go away to a deserted place, a quiet place, where they could be away from the endless line of needy people where perhaps he could put their experiences into perspective for them.

I would like you to notice once again that there is the pattern that Jesus himself used, this time with the Twelve.

- Retreat
- Reflect
- Commune with the Father
- Re-engage ministry

He retreated, reflected, and communed with the Father, to re-engage ministry.

Do you ever feel like that? That your life is so busy that you lose perspective? Jesus had the most important mission ever; he was to restore communion between the Father and humankind in the present age, and save all humankind for life eternal with the Father at the end of the age. He couldn't afford to be distracted from it. He knew the value of this model of retreat, reflect, communion with the Father, to re-engage ministry. And he modeled it for the Twelve.

But the retreat turned out to be nothing more than a boat ride. Now I should be careful how I say that, some of our boaters might find my words offensive. Maybe a boat ride is very relaxing, I wouldn't know, I'm not a boater and haven't spent much time on a boat. But while Jesus and the Twelve are on the lake, the crowd was keeping their eyes on them and wherever they ended up, Jesus and the Twelve were met by more needy people. And of course, Mark wrote that Jesus <sup>34</sup>“had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.” Having had a little time to retreat and reflect Jesus was already ready to get to work again.

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Then in verses 35-46, not included in this week's Gospel Reading, Mark told the story of the feeding of the five thousand and at the conclusion of that story Jesus

sent the Twelve off in the boat without himself so that he could go off by himself to pray, this time up on a mountain top.

- Retreat
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Once again, retreat, reflect, and commune with the Father, to re-engage ministry.

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In the next section, verses 47-52, Mark recorded one of the stories of Jesus walking on water, but we will get John's version of the story next week.

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The Gospel Reading for today continues in verse 53 where we find that the Jesus and the Twelve had landed the boat, but once again people recognized Jesus and immediately started to bring the sick and lame to him and many more were healed.

A lot of activity in this passage; a lot of energy sucked out of Jesus and the Twelve, and yet somehow they had the energy to keep on going. The work they had to do

was just too important to be stopped. And I think that what we can learn from this passage is to imitate Jesus' example:

- Retreat
- Reflect
- Commune with the Father
- Re-engage ministry

Many years ago I used to repeat an axiom that I had learned; "Keep the main thing, the main thing. And the main thing is your relationship with God revealed in Jesus Christ."

Jesus never lost sight of the main thing. In his fully human nature, he got tired and needed to rest. He occasionally needed to retreat, reflect, and commune with the Father to make sure he was still on the right track, so that he could re-engage ministry.

Stuff happened in his life that was unsettling, even tragic and heart-breaking, yet he was not distracted from his mission. He taught that same lifestyle to the Twelve and aren't we glad he did, because had they gotten sidetracked from their mission the Gospel might not have survived for us to hear. But God would have never let that happen.

Furthermore, Jesus knew that his mission to restore communion between the Father and humankind in the present age, and save all humankind for life eternal with the Father at the end of the age was not his alone. Think about it, God could have saved the world simply by waving his holy wand and making us and everything in the universe perfect. But what good would that do? God created us in his own likeness out of love, for the purpose of loving and serving him and others, and gave us Jesus, who taught us how that would look by his own example, and then sent us out to continue to spread the Gospel. That is our purpose, and when we get distracted by the things of life, we need to look at the example of Jesus and perhaps retreat, reflect, commune with the Father to get things back into perspective, so we can re-engage ministry.

This particular reading, with its jumping around, forces us to see Jesus in a different light. We are willing to see him as the great shepherd, teacher, healer, etc., but in

this story, he clearly has a bigger vision for ministry. He empowered and encouraged and nurtured the ministry of his disciples; not just the Twelve, but through the Church and through the Holy Spirit continues to do that for all who call him Lord of every place and time.

I wonder what the Twelve thought when he sent them out without him? Do you think any of them were heard saying, "I could never do that!" But with only his encouragement they did.

Then there is this emphasis in the reading on the pattern of

- Retreat
- Reflect
- Commune with the Father
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It is almost as if Jesus knows we have the propensity to get distracted.

And what is up with all these disjointed stories interrupting the first missionary journey of the Twelve and their return? Isn't that just like life? We get interrupted all the time. Here is another one of my axioms: "Ministry is what happens when you have your day planned." For me that means that my job is not really the administrative details of being pastor of a church, or the preparation of a 12 minute sermon; but it is the interruptions of rushing off to the hospital to be with people in need, or being a listening ear to someone who is in despair. That's when I feel the most useful. And that probably isn't far from your experience in ministry either, if you have thought about it.

### **Raisin' the Bar Challenge**

Ministry is not just what Jesus did. It's not just what the Twelve did. It's not just what the ordained do. It is what all who call Jesus Lord are called to do. And there is plenty to do. And God chooses to do it through you and me.

But more than just get things done, which might be "caring for others" part of my sermon title, he also wants us to also "care for ourselves."

In another place, Jesus asked the Twelve a rhetorical question about doing only one side of that balance when he said, <sup>Matthew 16:26</sup> "What will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life?"

I think the answer can be found in the way Jesus modeled self-care while serving as the example of the godly life.

After every ministry activity you do, you would be wise to follow Jesus' example and

- Retreat
- Reflect
- Commune with the Father, so that you can
- Re-engage ministry.

This will help you keep the main thing the main thing.

### **Prayer**

Loving God, we are mere mortals and yet, you have seen fit to call us to be disciples of your Son and our Lord Jesus. Help us to learn from his example to grow in our faith to serve you by serving others and caring for ourselves. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen