

**July 22, 2018 A Sermon for the Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
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GOSPEL

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

The holy gospel according to Saint Mark, the sixth chapter.
Glory to you, O Lord.

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

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

The gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, O Christ.

Do you ever wonder...when we read from Scripture...and the lectionary leaves verses out? Do you ever wonder what got skipped over between those commas?

I sure do. And sometimes I feel like I can guess what the composers of the lectionary were doing. And sometimes I have no earthly idea. I am a somewhat suspicious person, by nature...so if it feels like something is being left out...I am bound to wonder what someone is hiding.

And to be honest...most of the time, in the lectionary, it's just keeping the pace and focus of a story that might be folded into or around other stories. It can be pretty benign. They keep the good parts...the exciting parts...

Though sometimes they leave out the parts that are a little troubling...maybe just the parts that would make us squeamish, because we don't really want that much detail about circumcision so shortly after our first cup of coffee. And...honestly...sometimes they leave

out some pretty horrific things that are hard to understand and reconcile as part of the collection of texts we call sacred. We don't get to hear about Jael driving a spike through Sisera's temple, or the she-bears that Elijah set on the disrespectful children outside Bethel.

Today the omitted verses are not so much troubling as just...perplexing. We hear how Jesus tries to help his disciples find rest from the crowds that were following them and keeping them so busy they didn't even find time to eat. Jesus knew they needed rest. So, he took them to a secluded place. But the crowds were able to figure out where they were and followed. And later more and more people were brought to Jesus and the disciples to be healed...people who believed, just like the woman who had been bleeding for twelve years had believed only a chapter before...that even just touching his clothes could heal them.

But what happens in between? Oh nothing much...just Mark's telling of the feeding of the 5,000 and that one time Jesus walked on water. No biggie.

Seriously. That's the part that got left out. Only the most dramatic moments from this chapter along the Sea of Galilee. Only the most powerful moments. Leaving them out is plainly weird storytelling.

But, I decided I kind of love that.

Because, you know what? We all learned in school that a good story has a beginning, a middle, and an end...a conflict and climax and resolution...

But, pretty often, real life doesn't.

I mean...think about it...when did your story begin? Maybe, you'd pick the moment you were born. But...was that really the beginning? Because before you were born...someone was waiting for you...and even before that...the people who helped God create your life met and without their stories happening in just a certain way, at precise moments in time, you wouldn't be...well...you.

It's hard to find the real beginnings and endings of things. And...sometimes...the pace of our lives and our stories is not worthy of recording in a novel. So, today, we get to walk with Jesus and his friends when they are tired...when they can't sustain the action and pace of things. We learn that they knew what it was like to be so busy and consumed by work and the needs of others that they forgot to eat. They got so busy taking everyone else's orders that they forgot they needed nourishment, too.

So often the helpers and caretakers become consumed in the role of caring that they don't remember that they need care...or others forget to define them as anything other than one who gives...even though all of us need both to give and receive.

So we catch up with these worn out caregivers...and then we see that the demands on them are so great that they barely get a moment to themselves. The crowds continue to follow and press in. And Jesus feels for them so deeply. It is a gut-wrenching feeling of love and care...born out of an exhausted body and spirit. But Jesus has a well of compassion that we most likely do not. Well...anyway...I know I don't.

But I sense that he feels pulled between these needs – to rest and recover...and to care and to love the hurting.

So, know that if you feel that way now...or ever...you are in the very company and Christ and his friends. It is not easy. That is a tension we can't neatly resolve. Because both things are truly important. Care of ourselves...and compassion for others. If we lose track of either one completely...if we don't feel a little pulled between the two...we might have begun to wander a bit from the company of Jesus.

Because Jesus isn't just out walking on water...or multiplying bread and fish...Jesus is with us in the in between places. The exhausted places. The places where compassion digs an aching pit into our guts, even though we aren't sure our bodies or minds have the physical energy left to do anything about it. Jesus is with us when the pace isn't dramatic...when life isn't playing out like a movie or novel...when we are stuck in between the moments that feel the most important. When the story of our lives maybe doesn't even feel worth telling.

Jesus didn't come to pitch a summer blockbuster...or a best picture contender. Jesus came to be persistently, painfully, lovingly, confusingly, compassionately, simply present – close to us. Always. Carrying us to places of rest...and into the work of compassion and love...It won't always be the greatest story to tell. But isn't that amazing all on it's own. The God who set the planets spinning comes to be close to us...not in cosmic grandeur, with sweeping soundtracks, or miraculous episode after miraculous episode. The author of Creation comes close to sit with you over coffee, to snuggle in bed for 15 more minutes, to savor a meal, to laugh...and to point out beyond what you might notice and show you where the work of love is waiting to be done.

What a thing. To have a God like that.

Praise be. Amen.