

Pentecost 2 [Pr 6] 6/18/17
Matthew 9:35-10:8 A

WHEN HE SAW THE CROWDS, HE HAD COMPASSION FOR THEM, BECAUSE THEY WERE HARASSED AND HELPLESS, LIKE SHEEP WITHOUT A SHEPHERD.

Have you ever had a gut ache? Not the kind of gut ache that comes from too many brats this time of year, but the gut ache that comes when your loved one is diagnosed with that disease for which there really is no cure – and you sit there helpless. Your child is supposed to home at midnight and its now close to 1 AM and you are angry and afraid at the same time – gut ache. The spouse who once said “I do” lied to you – again – gut ache. Its family get-together time. That means that family member with the drinking problem will be there. Will he/she be the happy drunk or the screaming at the world drunk – gut ache.

Bear with me, I’m not trying to offend you by talking about gastrointestinal issues, I’m just trying to help us understand the words of our Gospel. You see, the Evangelist tells us, “When He saw the crowds, He had a gut ache for them.” Oh, I know, in English, we translate it “compassion,” but it really means “gut ache”.

In the Greek world of Jesus’ day, the entrails, our inner parts, were thought to be the seat of human emotion and passion. In our day, the era of Hallmark, we see the seat of human emotion as the heart, probably because “I love you with all my heart,” sounds better to our ears than “I love you with all my intestines.”

No, we don’t see our inner parts as the seat of our emotions, but this thinking still shows itself: “I had a gut feeling;” a “gut reaction;” “my gut was telling me...” A gut ache.

My point this morning is that “compassion” is really a weak word to help us understand Jesus. His very insides ached with their pain. He felt their misery to its fullest. Their helplessness pierced His insides so that He felt it with them.

“They were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” Sheep are the most helpless of animals. They have no natural defenses against predators. They have only 21 feet of vision, so they literally cannot see where they are going. If a little lamb falls on its back, it literally cannot get on its feet again by itself. Thirsty and hungry, wounded, lost, little lambs make easy prey.

Do you ever feel like a sheep? On this side of heaven, we are like lost, little lambs facing many dangers.

We struggle with temptation. One of the loud voices that harasses us today is, “If it feels good, do it,” and if we hurt our neighbor by it, well, that’s their problem.

We struggle with finances. A dollar just doesn’t go far today. With easy credit, we can get ourselves in over our heads before we know it, especially with the “keeping up with the neighbors” temptation before us. Just because your neighbor got a new toy, you have to have it too, right?

Sickness and infirmity seem to be a large part of our lives. We just finish one medication the doctor gives us, and off we go to see the doctor again, because something else hurts. Even worse, is when a spouse, or grandchild is sick, and you are helpless to do anything about it.

Then there are the natural disasters in our lives. As we struggle with drought, some parts of our nation have received so much rain, there is widespread flooding. Which many of you can relate to, because you’ve

seen your home and property filled with flood waters. A fire in London kills 17. An explosion in China kills 7 and injures 59.

Crime and terror seem to be rampant today. I turned the TV news on Tuesday morning, like I'm guessing many of you did, to hear the repeated reports of a US Congressman being shot because someone disagreed with his political views. It almost seems that we have become indifferent, even callous, to such tragedies, so much so that when 31 people die in a terrorist attack at a restaurant in Somalia, we almost seem to turn a deaf ear to it.

There are even people who go so far as to tug at your heart strings, to scam you out of your money.

Life in this valley of the shadow of death harasses us and we are helpless. The GOOD NEWS for us is that we are sheep of the Good Shepherd's pasture.

You may recall a parable Jesus told about a father who had two sons. The younger son -- he was a rascal, to say it politely. He wanted his money before his dad even died. His father gave it to him and he wasted it in prodigal living. He repented and went home to dad. Do you remember what his dad did? "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him" (Lk 15:20). That father had a gut ache for his son.

Jesus told that story to teach us about our Father in heaven. Even though we have wasted what He has entrusted to us, He had compassion on us. In fact, He sent His only-begotten Son to save us from all the threatening perils of sin.

The very Son of God took on human flesh and dwelt among us. He didn't come to merely suffer with us, to tell us how bad we've got it. Jesus

came to suffer for us. The Prophet Isaiah says it this way, "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows (Is 53:4)."

Jesus took the pain of all, the misery of all, the grief of all -- all that sin has cast upon us -- upon Himself and carried it to the cross. On that cross, He suffered all the punishment that we, the ungodly, deserved. The Good Shepherd laid down His life for sheep who love to wander, so that we would be forgiven. And, He rose the third day, to bring life and immortality to light, so that death would lose its sting.

And He gives us all the forgiveness, that life, that immortality that He won for us in the new birth of our Baptism. In that blessed washing, we die to sin and rise to live in Christ.

Baptized and living in Jesus, we have the heart and mind of Christ, and that means we see others with the compassion of Christ Himself. We see them as sheep without a shepherd, harassed and helpless among the many dangers of this world. We see that the harvest is plentiful. We see a Muslim, and see a lost sheep. We see someone whose skin color is different from ours and whose first language may not be English, and we see a lost sheep. We see someone involved in drunkenness, drugs, a promiscuous or homosexual lifestyle, and we see a lost sheep. We see someone who has been nasty, cruel, hurtful towards us, and we see a lost sheep.

St. Paul taught us what it means to have the compassion of Christ:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God (2 Cor 1:3-4).

Jesus comforts us, doing His work in us so that He can do His work through us. As Christ has had mercy on us and does His work in us, we are Christ to our neighbor. We invite them to church. We tell them what hope the Easter resurrection gives us and how joyful we are that we are going to heaven when we die. We share with them how Jesus gives us strength for today. Especially, on Father's Day, we remember the love and compassion of our earthly fathers, how in caring for us, they were a reflection of our Father in heaven.

The harvest is plentiful, My Dear Friends in Christ, so we see with the eyes of Jesus and have the heart of compassion of Christ Himself.