

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56
St. Marks's - July 21, 2024
Pentecost 9
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Christian community

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

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

When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret (gih NESS uh ret) and moored the boat. When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. 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.

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Christian community

Jesus shares his love and compassion with all who follow him as it was in the beginning and will be forever. Our Christian community is one of the gifts of love and compassion that Jesus offers and commands his faithful to live into.

Today we read about the 12 disciples (who Mark refers to in this passage as apostles). We read about them being gathered around Jesus telling him about all that they had done and all that they had taught. He had sent them out two-by-two to preach, heal and cast out demons and now they have returned.

He wanted to take them away from the crowds and the work that these crowds demanded. He wanted to give them a chance to rest. He wanted this because he

loved them and had compassion for them knowing that they had just returned from a challenging and life-changing experience.

I think it may have been then that the 12 chosen by Jesus started to become a Christian community.

Here they begin to come together to rest, to share their triumphs and joys, and to share their struggles and failures as well. To do all the things that bring together and bind a community.

Mother Turner talked last week about how we often only speak of those things we are proud of and she told us how important it is to share our whole selves with each other as Christians. Christians bound together in the Holy Spirit. The 12-chosen were just beginning this journey toward Christian community.

As time went on the hurts and offenses they committed against each other would become moments of love as they learned to repent and forgive and their Christian community became stronger. As Jesus' teaching about love and forgiveness became stronger in each of them they lived it in their lives. They shared this with their fellow disciples and they shared their love and forgiveness with everyone. Just as Jesus taught them to do. Just as Jesus teaches us we must do.

The Christian community that these disciples were building would support and sustain each of them until the end of their earthly life.

A community that echoes through the centuries to us here today with the question, how do we support and sustain each other in our Christian faith and life together?

The opening sentence of our reading speaks to Jesus' compassion and love for those he has chosen and the way his followers learned to live his love and share his compassion.

These 12 just returned from their first experience of being apostles. As disciples, they are students. Those who are drinking in the teaching of Jesus. Now they have returned from being sent by Jesus as messengers. As those sent by Jesus to teach. Sent by Jesus to spread the gospel. Sent as apostles of Jesus. In the case of these first 12 apostles, to heal illness and cast out demons.

They were tired and must have been just a bit or maybe even completely overwhelmed by the experience.

Jesus knew this and cared deeply for them. He showed them his love by listening to them and taking them off to a place where they could rest and regain their strength together. They headed off in a boat to a “deserted place”, but the crowd seeking Jesus and the gift of his miracles were already there. Their peaceful time together would have to wait. As is often the case in our lives rest and time together as our Christian community here at St. Mark’s takes a back seat to the needs of others. That was certainly the case for Jesus and his chosen 12.

Jesus, in our reading this morning, shows compassion and love for those hoards who flock to him for help. Help that takes many forms. They flock to him as, “sheep without a shepherd.” It was becoming more and more clear by the day that Jesus was the shepherd they sought.

Jesus and the 12 leave what was hoped to be, “a deserted place” and go to Gennesaret and the same thing happens. His love for those in need is still his focus.

Mark doesn’t tell us when Jesus and the returning 12 finally found time to be together in a quiet place, but I trust that they did.

When you looked at the front of our bulletin this morning you may have wondered if it was a mistake that there are two pictures there, but I hope that you can see that neither seems quite right. The top picture shows an elevated Jesus hovering above a group of older listeners. The picture below it depicts Jesus taking it easy with a group of friends.

Both are meant to depict this morning’s gospel. Both fall short of what I envision our gospel message to convey.

I envision the returning 12 and Jesus to be about 33-years old and to be similar in dress and demeanor. Jesus as the first among them, as their rabbi, but certainly not hovering above them and not simply ‘shooting the breeze’ as the bottom picture brings to mind.

Jesus was an integral member of their community. Just as he is an integral member of ours.

For the chosen 12 at the birth of Christianity it was through spending time together, struggling through their differences, learning together, sharing each other's joys and sorrows, and taking the time to know each other. Knowing each other well enough to understand the care, comfort, and nurturing that each of them needed when those moments of doubt erupted in their lives.

We are called to the same relationships with each other today. This closeness strengthens us and builds us up to: 'Love the lord our God with everything we are and to love our neighbor as we love yourself.'

The demands on our time are unrelenting yet the peace of God and the love of Jesus never leave us.

Our Christian community is one of the gifts of love and compassion that Jesus offers and commands his faithful to live into. May we hold fast to each other as we strive to do God's will in all that we undertake.

Amen.