

9th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
July 22, 2018

Text: Mark 6:30-34 and 53-56

Theme: Compassion

I visited George in the hospital last week shortly after his surgery. He was his usual delightful self, grateful for the visit, quick to share some of the details of what was happening to him, and then just as quick to ask me how I was doing and how things were here at Redeemer. Still excited about attending the ELCA National Youth Gathering with all 30,000 + teenagers, I told George about the massive worship services we attended in the stadium with live music and even livelier dancing. And in response he just looked at me and said –

That sounds absolutely dreadful!

And then he smiled as only George can do.

I know I return from these trips overly excited about the experiences. I also know that I share with you all the positive things that take place (and none of the negative) but in Houston there was only one dreadful moment.

On the first night of the gathering we were fortunate enough to get seats on the floor of the stadium which was an amazing experience and very different from just sitting in the stadium seats. We decided as a group to try to be on the floor of the stadium again on Friday night but so did everyone else. It was open seating to those who first arrived so people started forming lines outside the stadium at 4:00 pm knowing that the gates did not open until 6:00 pm.

Picture the scene: We divided into smaller groups so we could get as close to the front of the line as possible. It was a sunny, humid day with a heat index of 112. There was absolutely nowhere to move as we stood shoulder-to-shoulder in the blazing heat with little or no shade. All of us were just dripping wet from perspiration as we stood there fully aware that it would be like this for two solid hours.

Our experience on that Friday afternoon is what first came to mind when I read our gospel reading for this morning. Was that (what it was like) when those 5,000 + people saw Jesus and hurried and shoved and pushed ahead in order to see and touch him?

All the images we have in this one lesson are fascinating on so many different levels. The disciples just came back from their mission trip and they did exactly what we do when we return from our excursions. They shared all the details with Jesus and then all they wanted to do was sleep. Jesus took them away to a deserted place to rest but their plans were interrupted because he saw this crowd of people heading towards him. Intuitively he knew what they wanted and immediately he had compassion for them. The time to rest was put on hold as he sat down with them and started to teach.

In Scripture, compassion is a powerful word and it is used sparingly. As a noun it denotes the guts of a sacrifice. It is the word used in some familiar gospel parables like the one found in Luke 10 when the Samaritan had compassion on the man who was left by thieves lying on the side of the road. And in Luke 15 the father had compassion on his prodigal son. The word reflects a deep visceral response that leads to merciful actions.

Compassion is such a powerful word that outside of the parables the word is used only with Jesus as the subject:

Jesus, moved with compassion, touched and healed a leper.

Jesus, having compassion for the crowds, fed them.

Jesus, moved with compassion, healed the blind.

And in our lesson for today ...

Jesus had compassion on the people and began to teach them.

As followers of Jesus Christ we are called to be compassionate.

We become so affected (so moved) by what is happening right in front of us that we immediately feel it in the pit of our stomachs. It affects us emotionally but we also have a real physical reaction. It drives us to do the unimaginable for the sake of the other. It permits whatever we are involved in at the moment to be put aside until we address this greater need.

On July 2nd storms swept through the Pittsburgh area and flooded some of the local communities. The rental home for one of the newly called pastors in the area flooded. The assessment of their home the next day did not go well. While they had renter's insurance they did not have flood insurance. He and his wife sustained significant losses that included one of their cars that was totally submerged under water. The members of the congregation came together and emptied all of their belongings and washed all of the items they could salvage. The pastor and his wife are now living with a family from the church and the members started a fund to help them.

What people did not know until later was that on the day of the flood the pastor (who knew that his home was under water) helped to evacuate a neighbor who was disabled. He was also seen in a video carrying a young child into a car so their family could get out of the rising waters.

It is an amazing story but (then again) when people ask me about Redeemer I tell them right away about the amazing people who worship here. I tell them that you (too) are generous and kind and when you hear of a need you spring into action. We are a church that is known for our hospitality. We open our building to the community and on a Sunday morning we open our doors wide to greet and welcome not only our visitors but those who are an integral part of the church. We are a prayerful church that prays daily for those on our prayer list. And I believe we could add to that list that we are a compassionate church and I do not say that lightly.

It is here that our members worked with other Lutheran churches to form *N Street Village* because something touched them deep inside and they moved into action. It is here that Frank and Linda heard the cry of their son when he was in Guatemala and came home to start *Partner for Surgery*. It is here that we continue to put 300,000 + meals together for *Rise Against Hunger* because the need is so clear. It is here that bikes and helmets are being collected for the refugee children because something touched Tom and he wanted to help. It is here that we are hosting a refugee family even though the path is not smooth.

And that does not even include all that you do in your personal lives. It is the way that you quickly responded to Lorinda and Beale when

Laura had her accident. It is the meals you prepare for those who have had heart surgery. It is the bone marrow you donated to your brother. It is the physical presence you offered your best friend when she lost her son in an accident. It is the prayer you offered the elderly woman when you picked her up after she fell at our local Giant.

These stories are part of who we are in our life together. They form the context by which we live out our ministry.

So let me share with you what happened on that Friday night at the ELCA National Youth Gathering. We never made it onto the floor of the stadium because we had to tend to the needs of one of our youth who felt faint because of the heat. We quickly pulled ourselves out of the line and took care of her. It demonstrated clearly that we cared more about her than being on the floor of the stadium. It is another thing we can add to the list of things we do on mission trips. We teach our youth what it means to be compassionate. Amen