

Compassionately Preach Christ

RPTS Chapel Message

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Bible Text: Mark 6:32-34

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Please turn in your Bibles to the gospel of Mark chapter six and verses 32 through 34.

They went away in the boat to a secluded place by themselves. The people saw them going, and many recognized them and ran there together on foot from all the cities, and got there ahead of them. When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things.¹

Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for your Word. We thank you for Jesus Christ. We thank you for his ministry and we pray that as we take time this morning in this short passage of Scripture to look at a piece of the ministry of Jesus, we might learn from him. We pray in his good name. Amen.

We are here at RPTS, in one sense, to learn academics. In another sense, the seminary is a little laboratory. We are not here simply to learn academics; we are here to learn the practical outworking of our academics. We learn Greek. Why? So we can teach the Scriptures. We learn Hebrew and Hebrew exegesis so we can teach the Scriptures and lead men and women to Christ. We study Church history so we may see how those in the past studied the Scriptures, understood them, and proclaimed the gospel. We study systematic theology for this reason, to lay a foundation from which we may properly interpret the Scriptures and preach Christ.

When we look into our text this morning we see Christ preaching. We see Christ presenting himself. We see Christ teaching his disciples, they are there with him; we also see Christ compassionately presenting himself to the people. We see this is his priority. So, here in seminary, our priority is not just teaching and learning the academic disciplines. Our priority is learning to compassionately present Christ. That is the point I want you to get from the passage this morning. Learn to compassionately present Christ.

¹ Mark 6:32-34.

When we enter this story, we find that the disciples are fatigued. They are exhausted. They are feeling the pressures of ministry. They are not only feeling exhausted and feeling the pressures of ministry, but they are also carrying a sense of grief.

Verse 32 therefore tells us: “They went away in the boat to a secluded place by themselves.”²

Jesus had just been in Nazareth to preach. He was in the synagogue. He opened the scroll of Isaiah and said to the people assembled in the synagogue:

“Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”³

Hearing this, they threw him out of the city. This was a great prelude to ministry, wasn't it. Right after this, we see, in the gospel of Mark, that Jesus sends the disciples, the 12, out to preach, to minister, to heal the sick and to cast out demons.

In the mean time, Mark recalls the fact that Herod murdered John the Baptist. This is a little earlier in Mark six. You may recall that Mary the mother of Jesus and Elizabeth the mother of John the Baptist were cousins. And so Jesus and John were closely related. You can imagine that Jesus was carrying around some grief with regard to this murder of John the Baptist. Do you remember when Jesus stood before the tomb of Lazarus and he wept? I can't imagine it would be anything different regarding John the Baptist.

Then the disciples, the 12, come back and they report concerning their ministry.

Verse 30 reads:

The apostles gathered together with Jesus; and they reported to Him all that they had done and taught. And He said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while.” (For there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.)⁴

We can't fully comprehend the press of the crowds upon Jesus and the disciples. They were pressed on every side. They couldn't even eat or drink. For them it was like running a marathon without any water stops along the way. And so Jesus says, “Come away.”

And what happens? The crowds see them departing. Look at verse 33.

“The people saw them going, and many recognized them and ran there together on foot from all the cities, and got there ahead of them.”⁵

² Mark 6:32.

³ Luke 4:21.

⁴ Mark 6:30-31.

⁵ Mark 6:33.

Jesus and the disciples get together. They go down to the beach, get in a boat and begin to cross the Sea of Galilee. They are probably heading toward the region of Bethsaida on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. They are seeking a place where they can find some rest. But the crowd sees them. This is amazing. “There they go,” they shout. “We are after them.”

The disciples and Jesus are in a boat cutting across the sea on the North. They have a trip of about four miles. The people have a ten mile trek around the shore. Get a mental picture of this. The crowd can see the boat with Jesus and the disciples from the shore.

“There they go,” shouts the crowd. And off they go, running. They are chasing the boat. “After them!” “We must get to Jesus.”

Bystanders are asking, “What is going on? Who are you chasing?”

“It is Jesus.”

“Ok, we’re going with you.”

And off they run, joining the crowd.

This is part of the press of ministry. Those of us who have experienced ministry over a period of years understand that ministry can be demanding. Those of you who are studying to be pastors realize that those times will come when you are bone tired and you just want to say, “Enough! I can’t handle any more.” This is what was going on with the disciples. Yet the multitudes, the crowds are literally chasing them. Then what happens?

Well, look at verse 34.

“When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things.”⁶

He goes ashore with his disciples and he, with some discernment, sees the crowds. Not a small crowd, a pretty good sized crowd, and he looks at them with a discerning eye. He sees they are like sheep without a shepherd. Who is he? He is the good shepherd.

Would he take time for rest? Would he take time for refuge, exhausted from ministry already? Would he take time for himself? No. He sees sheep, people like sheep without a shepherd. His priority is ministry.

The gospel of Matthew indicates that the people are “distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd.”⁷ They are distressed. They are troubled. They are troubled with

⁶ Mark 6:34.

⁷ Matthew 9:36.

family difficulties. They are troubled with finances. They are troubled with disease and torment. They are troubled people and they have nowhere else to go except to Jesus.

And they are dispirited or distressed or downcast. God said to Cain, “Why has your countenance fallen?”⁸ In other words, “Why are you downcast?”

Well, the answer was because of sin within. The sin within was evident on his face. And so it was with these people. They were sheep without a shepherd. They desperately needed Christ. They were downcast. They were sin ridden and guilt ridden. They were depressed.

When you do a little bit of research about our culture today, you find that depression is one of the largest difficulties, one of the biggest problems. More antidepressants are prescribed and sold than almost any other medication. Some doctors—get this—some doctors are prescribing medication for unhappiness. For unhappiness?

This was the case of the people whom Jesus was observing. They were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd. And disregarding his fatigue, disregarding the grief he felt over the loss of this relative, this close relative, John, he enters into ministry. This is his heart. This is his meat and drink, his food. This is what Jesus came to do.

Look at our text again in verse 34.

“When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things.”⁹

I submit to you that the teaching that was going on here was a little different from going into an air conditioned lecture hall with a nice podium and beginning to teach a series of classes.

Now why do I say this? Our preaching portion this morning is the prelude to the feeding of the Five thousand. Verse 44 says:

“And there were five thousand men who ate the loaves.”¹⁰ Five thousand men.

Matthew says there were five thousand not counting, or “besides women and children.”¹¹ Think about this. How large of a crowd do we have? Ten thousand? Fifteen thousand, women and children included? Fifteen to twenty-thousand? This is no small group of people.

⁸ Genesis 4:6.

⁹ Mark 6:34.

¹⁰ Mark 6:44.

¹¹ Matthew 14:21.

Benjamin Franklin approximated the number of people who could hear George Whitefield preaching on one occasion in Philadelphia. The number was thirty-thousand. The number is staggering. Whitefield used no amplification. He powerfully projected his own voice.

When you speak to a crowd like this, you expend a lot of energy. This kind of preaching and teaching is real work. This is the kind of situation into which Jesus was entering.

My wife laughs at me after I am done preaching to a congregation of say two or three hundred or even in this chapel. My tie is wet because I've sweat through my shirt collar. I've also sweat through my shirt and if I've put papers or an envelope in my inside suit pocket, they are damp from the perspiration. Preaching is work. Preaching to a large crowd is hard work. This is the ministry into which Jesus was entering.

And you can imagine, friends, that when these people had crossed the landscape to hear the Savior and to receive of his ministry, when Jesus took to the high ground and began to speak, the people were saying to each other, "Be quiet, be quiet. I want to hear what Jesus is saying." A hush would go over the crowd so they could hear the words of the Savior. Thus he taught them and preached to them. As I say, in this context, it was what we call preaching that took place. It seems to me we cannot understand the text in any other way.

Oh, yes, there may have been pauses. The group might have broken down into smaller groups and there may have been ministry to smaller groups. That may be the case, but understand the size of the congregation to which Jesus was ministering.

And the text doesn't stop here. Read it again, verse 34.

"And when He went ashore, He saw a great multitude, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd."¹²

His heart went out to them. The word used in the original language has to do with visceral response. He reached out toward the people with heartfelt emotions. He couldn't help but do this.

The emotional tie reminds me of going into an aid station and seeing men lying on the floor and the doctor saying, "Over there, chaplain." You rush to the spot and there is a man lying on the bare wood floor with a foot missing and bones protruding from his leg. He grabs you by the lapel and says with anguish, "Chaplain, am I going to die?" Your heart goes out to the man.

And this is what is taking place in the life of Jesus. His heart goes out to the people and there are fellow-feelings. He empathizes with the people.

¹² Mark 6:34.

Isn't it interesting? The word "compassion," which is the translation of the original language, com-passion is a compound word, passion with a prefix. The passion and emotion rises in his soul. His emotions flow out to the people. He empathizes *with* the people. He experiences fellow-feelings.

And so, when Jesus spoke with compassion, emotion was mixed with that heart felt presentation. He had the passion and heartfelt desire to speak to the people, to connect with them on a personal level, an emotional level.

I can't imagine Jesus, for example, telling the parable of the prodigal son and getting to the climax of the parable and nonchalantly saying in a monotone with eyes cast down to the ground, "You know, you really need to realize that the father loves the son so much that he embraces the son and says, 'My son who was dead is alive, who was lost is found.'"

No! Jesus did not present himself in this dispassionate, unemotional, nonchalant, detached, casual way. Think of a lost son, alienated from his father, now home. The father embraces his son and weeps on his shoulder. Then he tells his servants, "My son, my son who was lost is found. My son who was dead is now alive. Get the fatted calf. Put the robes on him. Put the ring on his finger."

So it was that Jesus, full of passion and compassion for the people, presented himself. This was his priority. He was ready to spend and be spent. Fatigue and grief was set aside for the sake of ministry, for the sake compassionate ministry. This was the priority of Jesus.

And if this was the priority of Jesus Christ, should this not be your priority and my priority. Shouldn't it be your priority here at seminary to learn to compassionately present Christ? Isn't this the great objective?

You are going to have evangelism classes with President O'Neill if you haven't already. You are going to learn a methodology. But it is not just the methodology you need to learn. In the laboratory of the seminary experience, you need to learn to compassionately present Christ. That is the objective. In Dr. Gamble's apologetics class you will have apologetic encounters with people in the community. You will learn the methodology of presuppositional apologetics. But it is not just the methodology that is important. In the laboratory of life, you need to be able to compassionately present the Scriptures and compassionately present Christ. This is the priority. This is really why we are here together. This is what we are up to.

And so this is the lesson, is it not, the seminary lesson. And for those of you who may be prospective students, this is what we are about. This is why we are here. This is a priority. Learn to compassionately present Christ.

Let's pray.

Father, thank you. Good and gracious you are to us all together, unworthy though we be of the grace you have extended to us. You have been compassionate to us. Thank you. May we learn as a priority to compassionately present you and your gospel and your Son. Grant that this would be the case, in the good and gracious name of Jesus Christ who is the Lord. Amen.