

SERMON

Pentecost 8 – Year B - July 18, 2021

The Rev. Carolyn Bradley, Dcn

Human beings thirst for love. We thirst for compassion. We thirst to be known. We thirst for healing. For kindness. For meaning.

We thirst for the One who made us, the One who loves us, from whom we came forth awakening us to Love-consciousness. Let it be that we mature into the Love from which we are made. Let it be that we grow into that Love for which we are made.

The Rev. Suzanne Guthrie, Episcopal priest and author

Much occurs in Chapter 2 of Mark's Gospel. Jesus is rejected as a prophet in his home town of Nazareth. The Apostles are sent out on their first mission. John the Baptist is killed. Jesus stills the storm on the Sea of Galilee and walks on water. Lots of action and drama!

So today's selection from Mark seems rather subdued. Concise and not containing much strife, a quick reading of today's selection might have us asking what the take away message is. But again, within a relatively short Gospel reading, Mark gives us much to reflect upon.

The entirety of Mark's Gospel tells the story of a suffering Messiah, often misunderstood by His disciples, scorned by the religious authorities, and ultimately executed as a traitor to Rome. However, we recognize Jesus' divine authority in His miracles and in His teachings, as Mark's narratives guides his readers to understand the identity of Jesus as the Son Of God and the Shepherd of God's Realm. Mark wants us to recognize the power and authority of Jesus and also His compassion. We hear in today's selection urgency for the mission but compassion for the apostles and the people.

The image of the compassionate, attentive shepherd recalls Moses' prayer in Numbers. It is also an indictment of the abuse of power of political leaders who profit from their positions while ignoring the needs of the people they govern and are supposed to serve.

Today's selection tells us that Jesus, moved with compassion, for the people who had gathered, "Began to teach them many things." Jesus' ministry is about faith and social justice. We can't separate the two. Jesus demonstrates that people hunger for the word of God as much as they hunger for physical bread.

Jesus is bringing the realm of God into the world through His ministry. His message is meant to change that world, upend how it operates, bringing cooperation and compassion rather than competition and indifference. That task is now ours.

In the final verse in today's Gospel reading we hear, "And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the market places and begged Him that they might touch even the fringe of His cloak; and all who touched it were healed." The market place is a public space. Hearings, elections; buying and selling of goods...all occurred in this space. It was the political and commercial center of a city or town. By Jesus healing in such a space, He announces a reordering of priorities. The center, the heart of the town, no longer belongs to the rich and powerful, but is to be used to care for the weakest and most vulnerable people. If we are to continue Jesus' mission to live in God's Realm in this time and place, we must follow Jesus' example of faith, cooperation and compassion as the heart of our work. For faith will sustain us as well as bread.

Reading this Gospel made me think about the interconnectedness of faith and compassion. Our faith calls us to love God and our neighbor; to love our neighbor as our self. It

is simple then to see how compassion becomes the outcome of such belief. Compassion literally means “to suffer together.” Among emotion researchers, it is defined as the feeling that arises when you are confronted with another's suffering and feel motivated to relieve that suffering. (<https://greatergood.berkeley.edu>)

While empathy and compassion are required when working in any capacity with people, that sharing of self and trying to feel what the other feels is the stuff that burn out is made of. We need to recognize the tug of war for our souls that occurs between the spiritual and material worlds. As homiletics professor, Claudio Carvalhaes, reminds us we must try to “not fall into the trap of working hard for the cause of justice without attending to our souls and our emotional needs.” That is why Jesus says in today’s Gospel, “Come away to a deserted place all by ourselves and rest a while.” The desert is not so much a place in and of itself but rather space we create that allows us a time out, a time away from the constant demands of caring for others and working for justice. Daily spiritual practices help to create that space. If we are to do the work that Jesus did we must recognize our need for rest and time away and to sustain ourselves with spiritual practices. As I reflect on spiritual practices that feed my soul, I fondly think of my Dad.

My Dad was very much the typical Irish Catholic man. Very religious, he was a daily communicant, who prayed his rosary nightly. Dad was polite, a gentleman, and always willing to help his neighbors. Everyone he interacted with was treated with respect regardless of who they were. But like most Irish Catholic males, you were clueless about his thoughts or feelings. “Don’t explain, Don’t complain” was his motto. There was no point in complaining because, hopefully, we were just passing through this life to our real life which is in heaven!

As a child I never fully appreciated why it was important for Dad to be up and out in time to make daily Mass and then go to work. Sleep was a much more attractive option, especially as

a teenager. It was awful enough that on Sundays we attended, as a family, the 7 am Mass, when there was a Mass at noon! And Dad had to be early...getting to church even before the altar boys lit the candles and the nuns processed in to their pews. Now I understand that Dad's faith sustained him. And for an Irish Catholic of his generation, the Eucharist and the rosary were the best expressions of that faith.

Dad taught, more by example, than by words, that we were obligated to contribute our time and talent, not just money, to making our communities better places for all who lived there. The family would joke that there was no community group or fraternal organization that Dad had not served on... the juvenile conference committee, the Knights of Columbus, the Holy Name Society and the list could go on. But it was the volunteer fire dept. which involved helping people, neighbors, in the most desperate of situations and in mentoring new members of the dept. which really became his passion. Dad taught us, by his involvement, the importance of showing up and trying to make the world a better place. And he did so with compassion for all and sustained by the spiritual practices of daily communion and his nightly rosary.

As we leave this place after the service, I invite you to reflect on the interrelatedness of compassion, social justice and faith. In this Gospel, Jesus reminds us that we can't get so caught up in our work advancing the realm of God in this world that we forget to care for ourselves. We must pause and pay attention to our hearts, to our actions and to our relationships with others. Professor Carvalhaes aptly summarizes our task. "A heart without action is ineffective and an action without a heart is empty." advancing the realm of God in this world? advancing the realm of God in this world?

AMEN