

Proper 13A, 2011

Title: Jesus has Compassion

Text: Matthew 14:13-21

+ INI +

Think about what it's like when a loved one dies. Think of all the emotions that you go through.

First there's the initial shock, and then it sinks in that your life has been changed forever, that you're not the same person any more.

Then come the sadness and the loneliness, as you realize how your life will be different without your loved one around. You remember all the joy and the happy times you had together, but you are painfully aware that you won't be making any new memories together.

Most of the time, you just want to be alone, to process these feelings by yourself or with your closest friends and family. You don't want to be bothered. You don't want to go out. You don't want to have to work or deal with every day life. You need to take a break and catch your breath.

In today's gospel, Jesus has just heard the news of John the Baptist's death. John was a cousin of Jesus and the one who paved the way for His ministry. John and Jesus had a special relationship that went all the way back to the womb. Remember how John leapt for joy when he heard the voice of Mary?

John had pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And then John had baptized Jesus to fulfill all righteousness. Several of Jesus' closest disciples had started out following John but then followed Jesus.

And John was fine with that. He said, I'm just the best man, Jesus is the groom. He must increase, I must decrease. After John had been put in prison, Jesus said, "[A]mong those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist."

But now John was dead. John didn't die from old age or disease, he didn't die in war or an accident. He was executed because he stood against the king and his wife for their sinfulness, and she arranged his beheading.

When the news of John's death reached Jesus, Jesus left the crowds behind. He wanted to be alone. Jesus had emotions, just like you. He was devastated by the death of his friend, just like you would be, and Jesus tried to get away.

But the crowds just wouldn't leave Jesus alone. They followed Him and found Him, and kept pestering Him with their requests.

Jesus could have sent them away. Everyone would have understood. He needed a break. He needed some time for Himself.

There have been times when I've been having a bad day or a busy day, and someone calls the church or stops by in need. And I must confess that sometimes I've brushed them off or made excuses and not given them any attention, because I'm too focused on myself and my needs.

I'm sure that you can think of times when someone has come to you for help, and you've ignored them or brushed them off or sent them away, and justified yourself by saying that you're too busy or you've got more important things to deal with or that it's just not your problem. We can come up with excuses for anything.

But not Jesus, Jesus doesn't send the crowds away. He doesn't make excuses. He doesn't run and hide and avoid them.

No, Jesus has compassion on them.

The word "compassion" literally means that His insides moved. It was gut-wrenching for Jesus to see people in such dire need.

Maybe you've felt this way, too, when you pictures of people starving or dying, when you see kids in a cancer ward or hear about soldiers who die young.

These sorts of tragic situations cause a physical response. It's like someone punching you in the gut. You actually feel pain for them. This is what it means to have compassion.

When Jesus sees the crowds, He is moved by them. And it's not just an emotion, He doesn't just feel sorry for them and go on His way. Jesus actually does something about it. Jesus takes care of their needs.

Too often when we see a tragedy, we get emotional, we feel bad, but that's it, that's as far as it goes. We never actually do anything about it.

This spring we heard about the tornadoes that tore through Joplin, Missouri and devastated this town. And we felt the shock and the horror of all the devastation. But we also did something about it. The basket in the narthex is overflowing with gifts of school supplies to help those in need.

It's so easy to say, "That's not my problem. Let someone else deal with it." But that's Jesus' way.

Jesus saw the people's need. He had compassion on them, and He acted. He healed them. He didn't think about Himself. He didn't put His needs and His schedule first, but He put the needs of the crowds first, and He healed them.

He not only healed them, but He also fed them.

At the end of the day, the people were hungry. The disciples' solution was to send them away to fend for themselves. Let them buy their own food. But that's not Jesus' way. Jesus teaches His disciples to be like Him.

Jesus doesn't send the crowd away, but He has compassion on them and He feeds them.

Jesus has compassion on you, too. You come to Jesus needy, poor, sick, hungry, just like those crowds. And it's not only your physical needs. You are spiritually needy, too. You are sinful and in need of forgiveness.

But you need not worry. Jesus always has time for you. He's never too busy, He's never too tired, He never puts Himself first.

Jesus loves you. His love took Him all the way to Calvary to you, in His death on the cross for you. Jesus could have said, "No, it's not my problem. Let someone else deal with it." He didn't have to die for you, but He chose to do so. He had compassion on you.

Even now, Jesus has compassion on you as He forgives your sins. And He has compassion on you now as He feeds you with in His body and blood here in the Lord's Supper.

Just like the crowds, you come to the table sick and weak and hungry. You have nothing. But Jesus gives you everything. As Jesus healed the sick and fed the crowds, so He heals you and feeds you at His table.

Our compassion fails. Our love falls short. But not Jesus'. As we sang in the psalm, His love is never-ending. He showed His love to the people of Israel by guiding them through the wilderness to the promised land. He showed His love to the people of Galilee by healing them and feeding them. And He shows His love to you by dying for you and giving you His gifts of life and salvation.