Mark 6:34 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

Do you know what compassion is? I thought I’d ask that question because compassion is something that we demand from many of those around us, especially those that we hold to be important people. When we go the doctor or to the hospital, or any professional we expect that we will receive compassion. When it comes down to the members of our family we expect them to be compassionate toward us and I would think then that we ourselves would practice compassion. Because we seem to expect compassion from people I thought it would be a wise thing to make sure that we understand just what compassion is.

My dictionary defines compassion in the following way. “Sorrow for the sufferings of another, with the urge to help:” and “actively sympathetic concern for the sufferings of another, mercy.” The word sympathy means: “fellow feeling, condolence, agreement, approval, accord.”

Compassion then is a feeling that is to come from one’s inmost self or feelings. Compassion deals with the heart and affections of a person, but not just that they feel for us but that there is a desire to help the person. Indeed each of us here would probably agree that we would use the compassion a person displays as a measure of that person. The person we find to be compassionate we would more likely judge to be a good person while the person who displays little or no compassion we would not think very highly of.

Like you, I think highly of the compassionate person. To have a compassionate friend who understands our problems and works to help is the best kind of friend to have. To be honest with you, even to have a total stranger display compassion toward us fills our hearts and minds with a warmth hard to match.

Of course, the person who displayed the greatest compassion this world has ever seen is none other than our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Jesus was in the most unique of positions to grasp and understand the human condition. He is true and awesome God. He knows what is and was and what should be. He knows how badly we have failed to measure up to the perfection that the Father in Heaven demands. As God Jesus clearly sees our “hell-bound” nature.

Yet, Jesus is also true man. As a true man Jesus endured all that we humans have ever endured. He knows every temptation and the lure of every evil. He knows the flesh and its many weaknesses. He knows how our minds can falter, yes, how we can be deceived and might I say, “Easily deceived” with the bent nature sin has caused. Jesus knows these things and His reaction to them is compassion. A heartfelt sympathy pours out of him. His desire is to help. It is a compassion so deep and broad that Jesus willingly became our Savior from sin. Let that sink in. He not only knew our hell bound nature, but He endured hell, the complete hell of punishment to pay for those sins. So let’s take a closer look at our text then under this simple theme: OUR COMPASSIONATE SAVIOR.

To grasp all the more just how wonderful the actions of Jesus are, it is helpful that we understand all that has recently happened with him. By just looking at Mark chapter 6 we get a feeling for Jesus’ last couple of weeks.

At the beginning of Mark 6 we find the record of Jesus visiting his home town and being rejected by the people there. Although Jesus knew that a prophet would not receive honor in his home town, still Mark records the simple but telling words: **“And he was amazed at their lack of faith.”** Those words tell us that Jesus felt, perhaps more pointedly that Jesus was stung by the events of Nazareth. Jesus, the perfect man, rejected by his own.

Following that we are told that Jesus continued to preach and teach in all the villages around. Even more interesting is that Jesus prepares and sends out his disciples for their first missionary endeavor. Remember how he prepared them? “Only take your staff and wear sandals. But no extra tunic, sandals or money. If you are welcomed, stay there. If you are not welcomed, then shake the dust off of your feet as you leave.” So it is clear that Jesus prepared them for rejection. It is a sad fact of this world that people will reject the good news of God’s kingdom found in Jesus. There is no doubt that Jesus is all too aware of this.

Please note that the text doesn’t give a time for how long the disciples were gone. Our text does report their return, **“The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught.”** I can’t help but think that a pre-arranged time had been set for them to return, a time that was going to correspond with another event that would rock everyone’s world. Because although it is reported that the disciples drove out many demons and even healed many sick people, they do come back as one to report to Jesus everything.

In the meantime, while the disciples are out doing all of this, Mark records that this is also the time when Herod is going to have John the Baptist beheaded. You know the story of that sad event. Well it seems that John’s beheading and the ministry of the disciples and Jesus all coincide here. So as the disciples return to Jesus, not only was the excitement about the ministry on them, but the murder of the former teacher for many of them must also have weighed on them.

Now our text takes place as they all return. The problem is that there are so many people coming and going in regards to Jesus that the disciple not only don’t have time to eat but it seems their discussion about ministry with Jesus are thoroughly interrupted too. That’s when Jesus says to them, **“Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”** Do you see the compassion of Jesus? This is a tired group, a stressed group that needs rest. This is a group whose leader has suffered a couple of setbacks too. Please remember that John was Jesus’ cousin. So Jesus gets them all into a boat and off they go.

I admire the wisdom of what Jesus has done here. He gets the disciples into a boat where they can all be together, eat and talk by themselves and yes, get some rest. It seems that once in the boat they are just drifting along because the crowds on the seashore are actually able to keep up with them. So in one interesting action Jesus is not only able to meet the needs of his disciples but is able to keep the crowds interested and coming. What is most amazing is that all of this is going to culminate in one very awesome and unforgettable miracle, the feeding of the five thousand. I don’t know about you, but in all of this I see the wisdom and planning of Jesus for the glory of God!

But just as important, note that His disciples had a need. They needed to talk about how things went as they went out and taught repentance to people who maybe didn’t care. His disciples, no doubt also had the need to discuss the death of John and get Jesus’ perspective. Add to this that they could use a bit of rest and the ideal solution is found as Jesus gets them into a boat. I think that too often we miss the wonder of this. Where else could they have gotten away from the crowds and talked without interruption? Where else could they have found a place to sit and actually share a meal together without interruption? The boat. I am telling you that Jesus grasped, took care of and saw to the needs of each of his disciples as they drifted along the shoreline in that boat. It was absolutely brilliant.

By the way, if I were to draw a lesson from this action of Jesus it would be the idea of the importance of spending time alone with Jesus. The best work I do is when I am alone with Jesus. For me, it is not a boat with Jesus himself there, but it is my office, with Jesus very much present in his Holy Word and the Holy Spirit guiding in that Word. I would say to everyone, if you don’t take time to have a bit of “alone” time with Jesus, alone time as a family or alone time for yourself with the Word, you might just find that life seems a bit overwhelming. Jesus keeps the perspective. Jesus provides his wisdom and strength. Jesus offers his compassion and wonder each and every time you get alone with him. That’s the application of the disciples in the boat.

How long they were in the boat, we don’t know, but remember the crowds could follow along. When sufficient time had passed and the disciples got what they needed, it was time to land. Our text tells us: **“When Jesus landed and saw the large crowd, he had compassion on them.”** I wonder, how would we have reacted? When you get home from work and your family is awaiting you to meet their needs how do you react? Jesus sets the example. He isn’t wrapped up in his feelings. He looks at the people, at those waiting for him. Jesus doesn’t complain. He doesn’t whine and moan about too much work and a hard day. Jesus is filled with compassion. What a marvelous example for each of us.

The reason for Jesus compassion is simple. He sees that they need him. The text says more specifically: **“he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.”**

The perspective of Jesus is clear. Mark uses the typical language of the day to tell us what Jesus saw. In a country where sheep and shepherds were very prominent the message is clear. The flock of God was without a shepherd. The sheep were wandering, without protection and direction they were literally at the howl and claw of every hungry wolf. In today’s language Mark might have said, “They were up the creek without a paddle,” or maybe, “they were lost, the GPS was out, and no one knew how to read a map!” The people were definitely in need.

The need was for proper and true spiritual guidance. It wasn’t that there weren’t religious leaders. There just weren’t any religious leaders who had and taught the truth of God. The Jewish faith had lost sight of man’s sinfulness and God’s graciousness. No longer were people being brought to rely on God and his mercy. They were being taught to look within themselves and their own powers. The religion of salvation by grace through faith had been abandoned for the religion of salvation by works. The people were lost and adrift. They were frustrated by the demands of earning salvation and basically had give up. They considered God cruel, demanding and an overbearing deity that created hopelessness. I see people with that attitude all the time. The, “since I am damned, what’s the point anyway” heart. **“Sheep without a shepherd.”**

The rest of the people simply conned themselves with lies. They believed they were just what God wanted. They didn’t acknowledge sin or consider a close look at their problems. God had made them really good and since they were so good, why God just had to give them heaven. By the way, this was the group that would eventually murder Jesus and then believe it to be a good killing. Such is the kind of lie they lived. Again, **“sheep without a shepherd.”**

That’s why Jesus came. To be their shepherd. To be the shepherd of the whole world. Jesus came to deal with the problem of sin by being for each of us **“the atoning sacrifice for sins.”** Jesus took away the fear of death by his resurrection from the dead. Jesus came to give us the simple gift of forgiveness by grace through faith. Fact is, all that man needs is found in Jesus.

But we have a tendency to look to ourselves, to forget to get in the boat with Jesus, to figure that even though He is God and Lord that somehow we know better, see better, function better in life as we diligently ignore him, try to force him back into the grave and conduct our lives as if God were dead.

Yet I plead with you to know Jesus. He knows our needs and meets and exceeds every desire. Blessing after blessing is provided by the Savior. Blessings like: **“I am with you always.”** Blessings like: **“All things will work for the good of them that love God.”** Blessings like: **“God is faithful, he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.”** The list could go on and on.

All of this because our Savior has compassion. His compassion lead him to die for us. His compassion lead him to resurrection victory, a victory that is our victory. His compassion is ours by grace through faith, the simplest and best salvation possible. So, are you a sheep without a shepherd? Up the creek without a paddle? Feeling lost without a map or hope? Jesus the compassionate Shepherd is just what you need. Get in the boat. Drift with him. Eat with him. Converse with him. Stop fighting his guidance and let him be your Shepherd. Then you will find, you will not want. Amen.