



**August 10, 2008**

**Preaching: Rev. Ronni Verboom**

**Mark 6:30-34, 53-56**

## **“The Compassion of Christ”**

Let me begin our reflection time together with some slices of life. I’ve made these up, but I suspect you may recognize portions of them.

*Jack awoke to the blaring of his alarm. Sleepily he snapped the “off” switch and sat up. His eyes felt like slits. After studying for the chem exam until 1:15 a.m., he’d finally crashed, exhausted. He’d set his alarm to allow for a quick shower, but no breakfast. In twenty minutes he was ready to dash out the door, but his mom called out, “Jack, wait a minute!”*

*He paused. “Mom, I’ve really got to go! I’m running late this morning.”*

*“This’ll just take a second: Did you get the oil changed on the Honda yesterday?”*

*“Mom, there was no way I could. I had to talk to the dean about that problem in gym class—and I barely had time to make it to practice. The coach has been riding me about not being committed enough. Then I had to study for my chemistry exam last night!”*

*“Jack, you absolutely HAVE to get that oil changed! The car’s gone 1,000 miles over the limit already!”*

*Promising that he’d manage to take care of it somehow, Jack headed off to the high school. Pulling into the lot, he circled rapidly, looking for an empty spot.*

*He caught a glimpse of the flashing lights in the rearview mirror as he craned his neck, hoping to find a space.*

*“I can’t BELIEVE they hire police to patrol this lot!” He muttered under his breath. Twenty minutes later, with a ticket in his pocket that was going to cost him \$75 he didn’t have, Jack entered his first period class fifteen minutes late.*

*“That’s the third time you’ve been tardy this quarter, Jack” the teacher stated with exasperation. “I’m sorry, but I’m going to have to report it. That means two detentions.”*

*Jack tried to explain his morning, but she cut him off. “We don’t have time for you excuses. I have a class to teach.”*

*Jack slid into his seat, dragged his spiral out of his backpack and glanced at his watch. 8:25 a.m. and he’d already crossed swords with three people. “How can you ever win?” he wondered angrily. There was always somebody wanting something from him—every time he turned around he discovered another disappointed person saying, “You blew it, kid!”*

*Marie heard the wailing from a sleep in which she felt like a bus had driven over her. In fact, she felt like the bus had backed up and pulled forward several times. She rose and plodded into the baby’s room.*

*“Oh, honey, why can’t you sleep?” she breathed as she picked her daughter up and circled the room, bouncing the fussy infant. “Maybe you’re teething.” Marie had barely slept, with the baby waking her almost every 90 minutes. A rosy glow filled the eastern sky and the sun crept above the horizon. Marie’s spirits were anything but rosy. She wandered into the family room and sat in the rocker. Not a chance. The baby wailed. On her feet again, Marie glanced at the clock. 5:45 a.m. No point in going back to bed. She had to bundle the kids in the car and get Mike to the 6:30 train--- then home for breakfast--- then it was HER turn to drive for the pre-school carpool.*

*“Mommy,” a soft voice spoke behind her. Four year old Nathan stood in the doorway, rubbing his eyes. “Andy threw up, Mommy. All over the bed, on the rug, and even on his teddy! It smells really stinky!”*

*The phone rang. Not knowing which way to go first, Marie grabbed the phone. A friend was down with the ‘flu—could Marie fill in for her today at the church rummage sale? Before she could reply, Mike strolled past, mouthing, “Did you*

*start the coffee yet?” He was followed by a gooey little Andy, sniffing and sobbing.*

*Marie’s spirit rebelled. “I can’t do everything for everyone all at the same time!” Thrusting the baby into Mike’s arms, she ran from the room.*

*Ed awoke immediately aware that it was going to rain soon. His arthritis was sharply painful. He forced himself to sit up and stretch. His mind remembered Nancy’s condition every morning with an oppressive thud. He dressed, ate a quick bowl of cereal, brushed his teeth, combed his hair. All the while he thought of Nancy, who couldn’t manage these simple things. The stroke had sent her back to childhood, needing to relearn speech and movement.*

*Ed picked up his keys, ready for his daily drive to the rehabilitation center. This wasn’t what he and Nancy had planned for their retirement. It was hard not to be bitter. His hand was on the doorknob when the phone rang. It was his younger brother Jerry at the plant. Could he come by today, to go over some figures? Ed agreed, but felt resentment burning within him. Retirement? What retirement? Everyone clamored for his time and attention. Why couldn’t he and Nancy just have some peace and joy in these “golden” years?*

Human need. It’s all around us. We have all known times when those needs have pressed in on us, threatening to smother us.

Jesus and his disciples experienced this, too. Our Bible text describes two such times. Jesus sent the disciples off to preach and heal. They came back to report on their work, but there were so many needy people crowding around they couldn’t talk. They couldn’t find time even to eat! So Jesus said, “Let’s go off in the boat and find a quiet place away from all these people.” They left in the boat, but when they got to the quiet spot, it was filled with people!

The next verses for this morning pick up after Jesus fed more than five thousand people, after he spent some time alone, finally. He sent his disciples ahead in the boat, eventually catching up to them, walking across the water. Finally they all arrived on shore and once again they were met by crowds full of need.

Human need. What do these verses teach us about responding to human need?

First we see Jesus’ response of compassion. Most of us would feel SOME aggravation with the unrelenting needs of the crowd, but Jesus saw the people like sheep without a shepherd, and felt compassion for them.

We are called, as Christ's followers to do what he did:

- 1) To feel compassion for those in need
- 2) To ACT on our feelings, to help MEET the needs of others
- 3) And to have compassion for OURSELVES as well—when we are in need of rest and renewal, seeking a time away from others to be restored.

Jesus did each of these things. And we are called to do them, too. BUT IT IS VITAL THAT WE REMEMBER ONE MORE THING: only God can extend constant compassion; God is the only one who never suffers “compassion fatigue”.

Our culture teaches, “If I don't do it, it won't happen.” This is a form of atheism. It leaves God out of the picture. God DOES work through us, but God also works WITHOUT us, too. We must take times of retreat, as Christ did. When we are away, God is still at work.

Martin Copenhaver, writing in The Christian Century magazine, shares a story about a friend, “a person of considerable power and influence, who hikes for a week in the mountains every year. While he is gone he asks his wife to save all the newspapers delivered during the week. After his return he reads every one just to remind himself it all happened without him.”

We must PLAY OUR PART, in extending God's love and compassion to the world. This means we understand we have a PART to play. We are not expected to accomplish the redemption of the world—we have a Savior who can do this.

Sometimes we do too much. Sometimes we do too little. We must turn to God daily, even hourly, for wisdom, vision and clarity. And it is good to remember that we are, each of us, one of Jesus' sheep—and sometimes it is our time to RECEIVE his compassion as he ministers to OUR needs.

May we serve and follow our Shepherd with joy. Amen.