

9<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
July 25, 2021  
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church  
Mark 6:30-34  
**Sheep Without a Shepherd**

**Mark 6:30–34 (NIV84)**

*The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. 31 Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.” 32 So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. 33 But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. 34 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

A vicar in our WELS training program for pastors is a student who serves a one year internship with a supervising pastor at a congregation. It is the student teaching experience for pastoral training. After this year, there is one more year of classroom work and then the student becomes the pastor when called to a congregation. So, one should know something about what a pastor does and needs to do his job by the end of the vicar year. The congregation I served as a vicar planned to give me a gift at the end of the year to help me when I became a pastor. My supervising pastor asked me what I needed, what would be useful to me in my future ministry. I could not think of anything to say and so I believe I said that I did not have any stoles. Little did I realize that almost every congregation has a set of stoles for their pastor. Very few pastors need to buy their own stoles. After two years of seminary and a year at a congregation, I did not know what I needed or what would help me.

But my supervising pastor knew me and he and the congregation gave me three books. Two of the books complement the hymnal and help a pastor to plan the liturgy and worship. These have been a great help to me over the years. The other also goes along with the hymnal and is called the Pastor's Companion. I carry this little book with me to the hospital and home visits. I use it for baptisms, funerals, and private Communion. It has devotions, Bible readings, hymns and prayers. It has been one of the most used books of my ministry. And I did not know I needed it.

Maybe you've experienced this too. Someone else clearly sees a weakness in you or a need in your life and gives you a gift or some advice that is just what you needed. You were not even aware of your need and therefore had no idea how to fill it. But someone else sees it and solves it for you.

Jesus sees a crowd of people before him today that did not know what they needed. He describes such people as sheep without a shepherd. Jesus knew what these sheep needed and Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, provided just what they needed. He does the same for us.

**The Sheep Do Not Know What They Need**

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This had been a very emotional time for Jesus and the disciples. John the Baptist was recently executed by Herod. The disciples recently returned from their mission trips. They were physically and emotionally exhausted. But the people wanted to be near Jesus and as soon as one group left another arrived. There was no rest to be found in that place.

Jesus takes them on the boat to another place to get some rest. But the people get there ahead of the boat. The people knew that they wanted Jesus. The question is: Why did they want Jesus? The miracles. Think of all the miracles Jesus had done. He raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead! He cures leprosy, gives the blind their sight and drives out demons. Who wouldn't want to be around someone with such power? He can fix anything wrong in your life. And if you don't need a miracle for you or a loved one, you at least want to see Jesus perform a miracle. The people in the crowds thought they knew what they needed for their life, a miracle.

What do you need for your life today? Could you use a miracle? Fill in the blank: If only (this) was true, then life would be good. If only my head, shoulders, knees and toes were not in pain, then life would be good. If only I had a different job or different supervisor, then life would be good. If I just had a boyfriend, girlfriend, spouse, friend in my life, my life would be complete. If only we had a different mayor, or governor or president, then life would be better. If I just lived in a different house or neighborhood, life would be great. We often think we know what we need for a good life.

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

We too are like wandering sheep when we wander from one thing to the next to try to make our life happy. We think this will work and then that will work and maybe even go to Jesus to fix something in our life or fix the other person in our life. But we are often only treating the symptoms. We might make our lives look good on the outside and then be happy with that but Jesus knows what we really need. We need the living and active word of God, the double edged sword that judges the thoughts and attitudes of our heart.

### **The Shepherd Provides What the Sheep Need**

Our Shepherd provides what we need. Jesus has compassion on us by teaching.

*When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.*

Imagine this hypothetical conversation between a child and a parent. The child says, "I want to go to this place with my friends..." The parent responds with "When I was young..." All the child wants is to go and have fun but gets a story about the good old days instead. The child thinks the compassionate thing to do is to let them go. The parent shows compassion by teaching a lesson first and then maybe the child can go and maybe not.

Jesus has compassion on the people in the crowd and teaches them. Jesus has done miracles for people in the past and will do a miracle for all these people in our Gospel reading for next week. But now he teaches them because that is what they need.

God's word is what we need too. We need the Word of Jesus to show us our weaknesses. Sin blinds us and makes excuses for our sinful weaknesses. Maybe your weakness is in the area of greed for material things and we are blind to it because most around us are doing the same thing. But we hear in the Word of Christ that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Then we know we need God's forgiveness and help in resisting the materialism of this world. Maybe your weakness is in telling the truth. Lies and half truths make our stories more exciting and make us look good before others. When

we hear about the destination of liars - “their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur” (Rev 21:8), we repent and know we need the forgiveness of Jesus and his help to amend our sinful words. We may have an idea of our sinful tendencies and weakness, but the Word of God pokes at those until we say, “ouch” and recognize that we need a Savior.

We might not call it compassion for Jesus to expose our sins and weaknesses but it is. If the doctor doesn’t find the source of the problem there is little chance to cure it. Sometimes it takes needles or exploratory surgery to look for the problem before deciding on a treatment. It would not be compassionate to tell a patient whose is in pain, “We’re not going to do any test, scans, or diagnosis that would might bring you some pain. We’ll just let you die.” Jesus has compassion on us by teaching us clearly that we need him and his free forgiveness. He will not just let us die eternally.

He taught the people in the crowds to trust in him, to believe that he is the Savior God promised. He taught them about the kingdom of God through many parables. He taught them to repent and believe and that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. You see here the other reason the crowds would gather around Jesus. He gave them hope. Sure, he did miracles and some would have gathered only because of the chance of a miracle. But many stayed and loved Jesus because he taught them about God’s love, mercy, compassion. Jesus not only exposed their need for a Savior, he taught them that he is the Savior they needed.

You may come to church some Sundays with a very clear idea of what you want out of the service that day. And maybe the Word of God in the readings and hymns and sermon speak to the problem you want addressed. But there are times the Word of God for that Sunday does not speak to the specific issues and questions you want solved. One might begin to think that the Word of God is not relevant or relatable to them. But remember that Jesus shows compassion by teaching many things to the crowds. He does not just teach us what we think we need for today. Instead, he teaches us the many things we need for a lifetime on this earth and eternal life with him in heaven. When you aren’t sure how the Word of God relates to you when you read it at home or hear it in worship, tuck it away. Jesus is teaching you.

There will also be times when we go to our Bibles, to worship or to Bible class without expecting anything specific and Jesus teaches us something that we really needed to hear that day. Praise to our Lord for his compassionate teachings.

I was happy to receive gifts at the end of my vicar year from people who knew me and what I could use as a pastor better than I did. Those gifts have served me well for many years. We have a Shepherd in Jesus who knows us sheep better than we know ourselves. The following hymn verse beautifully explains why we continue to run to him as the crowds did 2,000 years ago:

*I am Jesus’ little lamb;  
Ever glad at heart I am,  
For my shepherd gently guides me,  
Knows my needs and well provides me,  
Loves me ev’ry day the same,  
Even calls me by my name. (CW, 432:1)*

Amen.