

**Mark 6:30-34** The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all that they had done and taught. <sup>31</sup>He said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while.” For there were so many people coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat. <sup>32</sup>They went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. <sup>33</sup>But many people saw them leave and knew where they were going. They ran there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. <sup>34</sup>When Jesus stepped out of the boat, he saw a large crowd. His heart went out to them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. He began to teach them many things.

Just about the most dismissive thing you can say to someone is, “Who cares?” Now, granted, sometimes people might need to hear that. They are getting a little too worked up about something that isn’t a big deal at all. I’d probably try to be nicer about it and show as much kindness and understanding as I possibly can. I’d be a really big jerk if I addressed everyone’s concerns by saying, “Who cares?”

The thing is that we’ve all asked ourselves that question. We wonder if even God himself cares about us. We might think that the problem we have is so small that it’s not worth God’s time to pray about it. Or we realize that the problem is enormous and it’s our own fault. If we go to God in prayer is he just going to say, “Now you’re coming to me? You made your bed, now lie in it.”

That’s not how God operates. There are so many beautiful passages like, “**Do not be afraid, little flock, because your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom.**” Or how about, “**Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, and do not let it be afraid.**” This text is another classic example. We will see that Jesus Has a Heart for People, both for believers and for the world.

In last week’s Gospel lesson we heard how Jesus sent out the twelve apostles two by two. They were going to get some practice proclaiming the good news about Jesus. That was going to be their life’s work. We don’t know exactly how long they were gone. Mark just gives us a quick overview of what happened, “<sup>12</sup>**They went out and preached that people should repent. <sup>13</sup>They also drove out many demons. They anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.**”

Remember what the word “repent” means. It means to have a complete change of heart. The people were supposed to turn away from their sin and trust in Jesus as their Savior. That was not something they could do on their own. The Holy Spirit worked through the apostles’ message and enabled people to repent. So it wasn’t just a command. It was a command that gave them the ability to hear and to obey.

Now in the beginning of this text Mark says, “**The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all that they had done and taught.**” They could turn to Jesus for advice and ask about certain situations and if they could have handled them differently. It reminds me a little bit about when my classmates and I went back to the Seminary after our vicar year. Now that we had some personal experience we could ask more intelligent and useful questions of our professors. We were better equipped for the ministry.

Even though we don’t know how long the apostles were gone, we do know this. They were tired. They didn’t have nice cars to drive from place to place. They went everywhere on foot. They were wearing sandals that were made long before there was any concept of “arch support.” They couldn’t get reservations at the local Motel 6. There were no hotels. They had to rely on the kindness of the people they were visiting.

Add to that the spiritual stress of the work. I’m sure that they were thrilled that Jesus gave them the ability to heal people and cast out demons. But Jesus had also warned them that there were going to be some people who would not accept them. That causes a spiritual pain that is hard to put into words. They have the best news ever, but some people just won’t want it.

Jesus was at the height of his popularity. People came from all over to hear him speak and to heal all their sick. Mark tells us that “**there were so many people coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat.**” So Jesus wanted to go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee where there were no towns so that they could have a moment of peace and quiet. Even though his ministry would only last three years, he knew that the human body was only capable of so much.

This is good for us to remember too. We don’t know how much time we have in this life. We want to use it wisely. But there’s a time we need to get some rest too. Far too many Americans are sleep-deprived and that affects everything in your life. So get some rest for your bodies. Make sure also to get rest for your souls. Don’t let vacations become a vacation from God’s Word. You need the spiritual nutrition than only he can give.

Our readings skip over verses 14 to 29. They cover the death of John the Baptist. He had been arrested by King Herod Antipas. Herod had taken his brother Philip’s wife to be his own. To make matters worse,

besides being his sister-in-law, she was also his niece. John confronted him with that sin. Rather than repent, Herod threw him in prison. Herod's wife succeeded in tricking him into having John beheaded.

So now the voice of the promised forerunner of the Savior had been silenced forever. Remember that a number of Jesus' disciples had first been disciples of John. So you can imagine that the news hit them like a ton of bricks. Maybe it made them wonder if they should really be in this line of work. Little did they know that all of them except for John would die of unnatural causes. Judas died by his own hand. The rest were put to death.

Now I highly doubt that any of us will be put to death for being a believer. Our right to proclaim God's Word as we see fit is guaranteed in our Constitution. People also have the right to ignore us. They can use their freedom of speech to tell us exactly what they think about Christians and Christianity. After a while you get sick of rejection. Eventually you might start to wonder if we should just give up on this Christianity business. It seems to be an awfully big hassle.

But the mere fact that people are doing this kind of thing shows just how much they need the Savior. Satan has blinded them into thinking that they are basically OK. They don't need Jesus. They don't need anybody. They really aren't mad at us, they are mad at God. They can't get to him, but they can get to us. It's hard, but don't take it personally. My grandpa said that if everyone always loves you, you are probably doing something wrong.

This is where we see the love of our Savior. He made us his people through the Word and Holy Baptism. He keeps strengthening us through the Word and Holy Communion. He knows that we are nothing more than human beings. He reminds us that he is the power behind the Word, not us. He gives us the privilege of being his witnesses to the world. Some will listen. They will have us to thank for caring so much about them.

Jesus Has a Heart for People, both for believers and for the world.

When I was a child I think I misjudged the size of the Sea of Galilee. I grew up on the shores of Lake Huron, one of the largest freshwater lakes in the whole world. There's almost 4,000 miles of shoreline around it. The Sea of Galilee is nothing more than a puddle by comparison. It is only 33 miles in circumference. So that helps explain how what Mark records in this text could be true.

A number of people saw Jesus and his disciples leave by boat and they figured out where they were heading. A large group got together and walked around the sea. As a matter of fact, they beat the boat to the other side. You would almost think that the disciples would have rolled their eyes and said, "Didn't we just leave this party? We came over here to get away from everything and now everything has come to us!"

I think we sometimes forget that even though Jesus is true God he is also a true human being. During his state of humiliation Jesus got hungry, just like we do. He got tired, just like we do. He needed some time to get away just like his disciples did. But he didn't say, "Alright, everybody back in the boat!" and head somewhere else. Mark tells us, "**His heart went out to them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. He began to teach them many things.**"

If you remember back when Pastor Daniel Sims preached for our Mission Festival, he taught us a Greek word: *splanchna*. It literally means your guts. The EHV translation puts it in the way that we would speak in English, saying Jesus heart went out to them. The Greek takes the word for "guts" and makes a verb out of it. I think we can understand that. When we are really worked up about something we feel it in our guts. Sometimes we talk about having butterflies in our stomachs.

It shows the kind of love that Jesus has for the world. He wasn't reluctant to come here. He didn't hold it against us that he was going to have to die for sins that he never even dreamed about committing. We see his love when he weeps at the death of Lazarus because he sees how much death hurts the people he loves. He even weeps over the city of Jerusalem because he wanted nothing more than to save them, but they stubbornly rejected his love.

Jesus didn't just talk about that love either. That love sent him to the cross. Even though he would suffer in ways that we can't even begin to imagine, he wanted to go. He would much rather suffer Hell than see us even be there for a moment. But he endured it all so that God could declare the world to be not guilty of any sin. Because of Jesus' precious blood, we stand before God holy, perfect, and innocent.

Jesus describes the crowds as being like sheep without a shepherd. Sheep without a shepherd are doomed. They are not particularly bright animals. They can't find food or water for themselves. They are helpless against wolves who would find them to be a delicious snack. In Psalm 23, the Psalm we just sang, God is revealed as the shepherd who lovingly takes care of us, his sheep.

In the first lesson for today God speaks through the Prophet Jeremiah. Already back then their spiritual leaders had failed them. They led God's people away from him. He warns them, "**You have not taken care of**

**them, but I will certainly take care of you.**” If that sounds like a threat, you are right. Unfortunately they didn’t listen. The Pharisees at Jesus’ time just loaded up burdens on the people. They gave them more than 600 extra commands to follow, but offered them no help at all.

So as tired as Jesus was, he took the opportunity to teach them. And it wasn’t just a quick five minute devotion either. Mark tells us that **“He began to teach them many things.”** This is one of the places where I really wish that the Holy Spirit would have inspired Mark to write some of those things down for us. I would give anything to have been a fly on the wall there. In next week’s Gospel lesson we will see that he took care of their earthly needs too. It’s the feeding of the 5,000.

Today Jesus is in his state of exaltation. He remains a true human being, but he no longer gets tired or hungry. We don’t have to worry that when we pray that he might be taking a nap or something and it will be a while before he gets back to us. Yes, he is hard at work governing the whole universe for the benefit of his Church, but he is never too busy for you. He wants you to come to him with any care or concern you might have and know that he is more than capable of taking care of it.

He is always there to speak to us in his Word too. Even though I couldn’t be there to hear what Jesus taught on this particular day, the Holy Spirit has recorded tons of Jesus’ teachings for us. Most importantly he shows us that Jesus died for us too. Our sins have been taken away. He knows what it feels like to be tempted. Just like his heart went out to the people of his day, it goes out to us as well.

That’s the love he still has for the world too. That’s why he wants to use us just like he used the apostles so many years ago. Our world today is very much like a bunch of sheep wandering around aimlessly. Spiritual wolves are everywhere spreading false teaching, hopelessness, and doubt. Point them to their real and living hope in Jesus. May our hearts go out to the lost so we faithfully use the time God gives us to lead them to him.

Jesus Has a Heart for People, both for believers and for the world. “Who cares?” God does. He always has and he always will. He knew us and cared about us before day one of creation. He cared about us when he made us his own through Holy Baptism. We will live every moment of our lives under his care, love, and protection, until he takes every problem away in eternal glory.