

# The Compassion of Christ

Mark 6:30-44 (ESV)

November 3, 2002

“When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things.” Jesus had compassion on them, so he began to teach. How very odd! That is not how we do things today. Jesus had compassion on them, so he fed them with the word of God. He had compassion on them, so he shared the gospel with them. He had compassion on them, so he poured out upon them grace, mercy, and love. Do you think he did the right thing? All those poor, hungry people out there in the wilderness, and Jesus began to teach? What does that mean?

Of, yes, Jesus fed them, too, but that was later. That was secondary. That came after the sermon. Notice what was primary. Notice what came first. Notice what took priority. Jesus had compassion on them, so he began to teach. Do you think that means something? Before he fed them, with no effort to clothe them, with no thought of housing them, with no attention to their medical needs, Jesus began to teach. And they stayed there until the hour was late. Remarkable!

Maybe Jesus was onto something. Maybe Jesus understood why, when he and his disciples left on the boat for a retreat, a great crowd from all the towns ran on foot around the shore and got there ahead of them. The crowd was not there to see the disciples. The crowd was not there to enjoy the great out of doors. The crowd was not there to be at harmony with the world. The crowd was not there for a political rally. The crowd was not there for a show. The crowd was there to hear a word from God. The crowd was there to hear a word of life. The crowd was there in the great hope that the silence of heaven would be broken. The crowd was there because they were hungry in their souls. Jesus had compassion on them, so he began to teach.

Jesus knew that our deepest hunger is spiritual. Our deepest hunger is not physical, emotional, psychological, social, societal, financial, economic, political, national, racial, or ethnic. Our deepest hunger, our greatest need, is for God. God created us for himself, and our souls are restless until they find their rest in him (Augustine, *Confessions*). Jesus had compassion on them, so he began to teach. He fed them the word of God. He fed them the gospel. And that is how he gave them himself. No wonder they stayed!

How is it that so many people today think they are beyond all this? How is it that so many people seek after that which does not satisfy, that which does not fill

them, that which cannot sustain them? Why do we turn away from the word of God? Do you see the significance of Jesus giving himself to the people in, through, and by his word? We still have his word yet today. We still have his teaching yet today. We still have his gospel yet today. And it is in, through and by his word, his teaching, and his gospel that we still have full access to him yet today. Jesus is the content of the gospel. Jesus is the word from God. Jesus is what he teaches us. Jesus is the good news. Thanks be to God! Jesus has compassion on us, too, so he teaches us himself.

On Thursday night, which was Halloween, a little girl knocked at our door. When I answered it, she asked, “Do you remember me?” And I am happy to say that, yes, I did remember her. She had asked me the same thing the year before. “Do you remember me?” It is an engaging question. You see, the little girl used to live next door to us. We would see her, her older brother, and her younger sister every day, often retrieving some toy from our yard. But then her parents separated and divorced and they all moved away. Every year on Halloween, the children come back, and the one little girl always asks, “Do you remember me?” I always assure her that I do, and I thank her for coming. It is always good to see her.

It seems to me that her question is the same question with which we all cry out to the world, to the universe, and even to God. “Do you remember me?” Do you even know that I am here? Does anybody care? This very human question is the reason the crowd “were like sheep without a shepherd,” lost, wandering, and hurting. This very human question is the reason God sent Jesus Christ. This very human question is the reason Jesus had compassion on the crowd. And this very human question has its answer in Jesus Christ. Yes, I remember you. Yes, I know you. Yes, I care about you and love you.

Is there anyone among us who does not want to be remembered? Is there anyone among us who does not want to be known? Is there anyone among us who does not want to be cared for and loved? I do not think so. And it is the compassion of God in Jesus Christ that the one who thought about us before the creation of the world still remembers us, that the one who called us by name before we were still knows us, and that the one who made us for himself still cares for us, provides for us, sustains us, and redeems us.

Is it not interesting that the disciples grew weary of the crowd a long time before the crowd grew weary of Jesus? I suspect that happens in our own work as the church. We may grow weary of the world long before the world hears everything it needs to hear of Jesus Christ. But even as the disciples tried to send the crowd away, Jesus turned it back on them: “You give them something to eat.” “You give them something eat.” There was to be no rest for the weary. Jesus had fed the crowd with the word, and, in case the disciples had not gotten it, he engaged them in

a tremendous demonstration of his power and grace. “You give them something to eat.” They brought him what they had, five loaves and two fish. And when he blessed and broke them and gave them to the people, five thousand men ate their fill, and each of the twelve slack jawed disciples was left holding a whole basket full of leftovers, trying to figure out what had just happened. Do you think they got the message? Do you think they understood? Do we get the message? Jesus is more than enough for all our needs. The word of God more than satisfies us. The gospel of grace can feed the whole world. Thanks be to God!

There are few things the church has done better than try to feed the hungry of the world. That is a good thing to do, and we want to continue it, and we want to do it better than we have ever done it before. At the same time, we need to remember that physically feeding the hungry is a secondary mission of the church, while preaching, living, and sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ is our primary mission. That is who we are. That is what we are about. That is why we are here. We are taught and fed the word of God so that we may feed the hungry world the gospel of Jesus Christ. There is nothing more compassionate that we can do.

So are we to extend to the world the same invitations that brought us here. If you are hungry, come to the pulpit and come to the table so that Jesus may feed you. If you want to know whether you are remembered, listen to the gospel of how God has come to you in Jesus Christ. If you want to be known, hear the call of the good shepherd who calls us his own and who calls us by name. Jesus has compassion on us, so he begins to teach.

*To God be the glory forever and ever! Amen.*

Dr. James C. Goodloe IV, Minister  
Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church  
1627 Monument Avenue  
Richmond, VA 23220-2925  
Telephone 804-359-2463  
Facsimile 804-278-6298  
[goodloe@grace-covenant.org](mailto:goodloe@grace-covenant.org)