**JESUS, OUR COMPASSIONATE SHEPHERD  
Mark 6:30–44**

**“*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.*” (v. 34)**

In last week’s passage, we saw Jesus was not welcomed in his hometown. His rejection by his own countrymen was a shadow of his ultimate rejection from the nation of Israel and the world. What could motivate Jesus to come to this world knowing that he would face such rejection and suffering? In today’s passage, we get a glimpse into the heart of Jesus, the inner emotions of God himself for suffering sinners. Through this message, may we learn Jesus’ compassion for the world and his hope to shepherd them through raising up his followers as compassionate shepherds to feed the world.

1. **Jesus’ Compassionate Shepherd Heart (vs. 30–36)**

Jesus’ disciples whom he had sent out finally returned from their short-term mission trip. Look at verse 30: “***The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught.***” After their mission trip, the Twelve were called apostles—ambassadors of Christ. The apostles were brimming with excitement as they returned; they couldn’t wait to tell Jesus about the way that God had used them to preach the gospel, heal the sick, and even drive out demons. They may have confessed breathlessly, “*Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name!*” (Luke 10:17b). The apostles’ mission had been victorious such that “*Jesus' name had become well known*” (14), but it had not been easy, for they had been traveling about and waging the fierce spiritual battle to free sinners from Satan’s power. The disciples must have been exhausted from serving God. But did they get a chance to rest now that they were back with Jesus? Look at verse 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.’***” Jesus knew their weary condition and invited them to come and be alone with him in a quiet place and find rest in him. Jesus invites us also to spent quiet time alone with him each day to find rest and refreshment in him.

Jesus’ disciples must have been anticipating such relaxing quiet time alone with their beloved teacher, away from the demanding crowds, as they “***went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place***” (32). But what did they find when they landed? Look at verse 33: “***But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.***” The same crowd whose constant coming and going had left Jesus and his disciples no time even to eat had followed them to the remote site of their sabbatical retreat—they wouldn’t be getting their long-awaited rest after all. We don’t know exactly what the disciples felt when they saw a multitude of people thronging to meet them in that supposedly solitary place, but I can imagine how I would have felt. I might have been frustrated with their inconsiderate actions, disappointed at the change of plans, and tempted to weigh anchor and head for another port.

But this is not how Jesus saw them. Let’s read together verse 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.***” Sheep without a shepherd are quite pitiable, for they are weak and ill-equipped to find food or defend themselves from predators or thieves. When Jesus looked at the crowd, he saw them with a shepherd’s heart, not considering the cost to himself, but recognizing their needs. The fact that so many people would run after Jesus even to such a remote place highlights just how desperate and needy they were. When Jesus saw their desperate, wandering condition, he felt their pain in his own heart, for compassion literally means to “suffer with” someone. They were harassed by Satan and sin and helpless to save themselves or fix their condition (Mt 9:36). Moreover, Jesus also saw their physical, emotional, and mental needs; they weren’t eating well and hadn’t packed a meal for their excursion, they were hungry for love and meaning in life, and they were ignorant of the spiritual reality of God’s will and his kingdom and Jesus’ messiahship. In short, they needed a shepherd’s comprehensive care. Jesus prioritized their spiritual need by teaching them many things, especially about the kingdom of God (Lk 9:11).

We too are like sheep. Isaiah confessed, “*We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way*” (Isa 53:6a). Each of us was in the desperate, helpless condition of having wandered away from God’s fold when we sinned against God’s law, choosing to go our own way rather than obey God. But God saw us wandering and harassed by Satan, and he sent his Son Jesus to be our good shepherd, to search us out, take us in his arms, and return us to his fold. This is why Jesus came to this world. Because Jesus became human, we know that he understands and empathizes with our weaknesses, struggles, and sufferings. He knows our needs. When we are hungry, thirsty, and weary, he feels same hunger, thirst, and weariness. When we are sick, he agonizes over us as parents suffer when their beloved children are sick. When we suffer discouragement, depression, and despair, his heart aches in sympathy. When we wander in misery due to our sins, hurt and wounded, he feels our pain and intercedes for us through wordless groans (Ro 8:26, Heb 7:25). We can take great comfort in Jesus’ compassion for us. Jesus showed his shepherd’s heart for us by laying down his life for his sheep, by bearing our iniquity and infirmities in his body on the cross. Moreover, he sent his servants to shepherd us and teach us his words so that we could know him and be known by him.

When we know Jesus’ shepherd heart for us, we can know his shepherd heart for the world. Just as Jesus sympathizes with our weakness, so he looks at the world and sees his sheep lost and wandering, and his heart breaks for them. However, when we look out at the campus, we easily see the outward appearance of bright and privileged and hardworking and successful young adults, who seem to have it all together and lack nothing. But beneath this happy and hopeful façade is often a spiritual void—a deep emptiness due to lack of meaning and direction. Students today have grown up in a postmodern culture that calls good evil and evil good. They have not been taught about sin or warned of its devastating consequences. They are at an important juncture in life, susceptible to influence, both good and bad, yet surrounded by the temptations and deceptions of this world.

As Jesus taught the large crowd into the evening, his disciples grew concerned about the crowd and brought their concern to Jesus in prayer. Look at verses 35–36: “***By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. ‘This is a remote place,’ they said, ‘and it's already very late. 36 Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.’***” The disciples were paying attention to the needs of the crowd: the hour was late, the place was remote, and the people hadn’t packed food; they were worried lest the people go hungry or have to make their way back home in the dark. We too, should pay attention to the needs of the people around us, and, noticing them, should bring those needs to Jesus in prayer, asking him to do something about it. When the disciples brought the needs of the crowd to Jesus, he answered them in a way they never could have expected.

1. **You Give Them Something to Eat (vs. 37–41)**

When the disciples noticed the problem and asked Jesus about it, it hadn’t crossed their minds that they should do anything about it themselves, or even that they could. But Jesus challenged them to look beyond their human limitations. Look at verse 37a: “***But he answered, ‘You give them something to eat.’***” Jesus’ answer to the disciples’ prayer was they themselves. Out of Jesus’ compassion for the crowd, he *would* feed them and care for them, and he would do it by raising up his disciples as compassionate shepherds for them. The disciples had consideration for the crowd’s need, but Jesus wanted them to learn compassion and stewardship and responsibility—a shepherd’s heart.

When the disciples heard Jesus’ suggestion that they should feed the crowd, they immediately objected. Look at verse 37b: “***They said to him, ‘That would take more than half a year's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?’***” The disciples calculated how much money they would need to spend on bread to feed the hungry multitude before them—even assuming they could find a nearby bakery with that much bread on hand. Based on their calculations, what Jesus was asking of them was unfeasible economically and logistically. But their pessimistic assessment of the situation didn’t factor in Jesus’ mighty power.

Jesus brought to bear his divine power to feed the five thousand, but he didn’t do it alone. He involved his disciples in his providing for the needs of the crowd in three ways, which we can learn from today, for the way God has chosen to care for his sheep is still through his disciples, through his church.

First, five loaves and two fish. Look at verse 38: “***‘How many loaves do you have?" he asked. ‘Go and see.’ When they found out, they said, "Five—and two fish.’***” Instead of telling his disciples to go off and bring back wagons laden with bread, he wanted to use what they had on hand. So he asked them to take stock of what was immediately available. All they could come up with was five loaves and two fish. John’s account specifies that they were five *small* loaves and two *small* fish—enough for a boy’s dinner, but not much more (Jn 6:9). Even though all they had was plainly woefully inadequate, they brought what they had to Jesus by faith. The response of faith that Jesus can use is not passively to hope that God will somehow do something, but going to work with what we have trusting that Jesus will make up what is lacking out of his boundless resources.

Jesus asks us also to “go and see” what we have, which we can use for his work, to care for his sheep. What we have may seem humble and insignificant compared to the great need we see, but we should act in obedience and faith to offer what we can before Jesus. So what can we offer? What are our five loaves and two fish? There may be many examples, but I’d like to mention two things.

We can offer our prayer. Anyone can pray—anytime and anywhere. Jesus opened the way for us to come boldly in prayer before the Father through his mediation. Though our prayer may not feel like it’s working, the Bible assures us that “*the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective*” (Jas 5:16). Jesus told his disciples to pray for him to raise up spiritual leaders, using the metaphor of a harvest in Matthew 9:38, saying, “*Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.*” We should pray for God to raise up shepherds for this generation, for our nation, for our campus. We should pray for growing students, that God might protect them from Satan’s attacks and help them to mature in faith and be deeply rooted in Christ. Prayer is necessary for God’s work.

Also, we can offer to Jesus our one-on-one Bible studies. This is something almost anyone can do. The skills learned in high school of writing a book report and giving a presentation are the only skills that are strictly necessary to teach the Bible. If you have gone to church for a while and studied the Bible, then it will be easy to find students who know less about the Bible whom you can teach. If they ask a question you don’t know, tell them you don’t know, but that you will look it up and get back to them. One-on-one Bible studies seem like a time-consuming and inefficient way to reach a whole campus, but when we offer them by faith, God can use our seemingly small offering to have a big impact. But we should also have Jesus’ compassion to serve students. When I was considering Jesus’ shepherd heart revealed in this passage, God showed me that I really need to grow in the area of compassion for his sheep. He showed me that I often forget important details about Bible students, and sometimes when students are talking, I’m thinking of what to say next instead of actively listening, showing that I care more about appearing wise than about the students I'm serving. I repent of such a selfish attitude and resolve to listen earnestly and care genuinely about Jesus' sheep whom he's entrusted to my care.

Second, have the people sit down. Look at verses 39–40: “***Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. 40 So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties.***” The disciples coordinated the large crowd getting settled into groups so that the food could be distributed efficiently. This action that Jesus had his disciples do seems unimportant, but it actually required great faith. Having the people sit down was like setting the table. Every week, after worship service, the brothers set up tables for lunch because we believe that God has prepared food for us through our women coworkers. But the disciples knew there was no food yet. The people who sat down would be expecting dinner, and if Jesus didn’t come through, the disciples would look very foolish. The disciples had to act by faith, and by doing so they could create an atmosphere of faith in which Jesus could work.

Inviting people to Bible study and worship service is like having them sit down. There is an expectation that Jesus will provide something of value, but if Jesus doesn’t work in their hearts, we will look foolish. Going to campus and inviting students to Bible study is also something anyone can do. Some people are particularly good at striking up a conversation with random students and persuasively inviting them to come to Bible study—I personally am not—but *anyone* can ask students, “Would you like to study the Bible?” Inviting students individually seems very insignificant next to the size of the campus, and many students will reject the invitation, but many of us, myself included, can testify that God reached us through just such an invitation. Some church services are flashy and entertaining, with professional musicians and popular preachers, whereas our worship service is very humble by comparison. When we invite people to worship service, we do so by faith that Jesus’ love will be manifest in us, his body, and that his Spirit will work through the preaching of his word.

Third, distribute what Jesus gives us. Look at verse 41: “***Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all.***” The disciples didn’t give what they had directly to the people; instead, they first offered it to Jesus, then distributed what they received back from him. Jesus worked together with his disciples, so that they could become channels of God’s grace. We cannot hope to serve Jesus’ sheep just by our own strength and wisdom. Instead, we must first receive from Jesus his love, his compassion, his forgiveness, his power, and his words. Such continual receiving from Jesus is necessary to feed God’s flock. When we study his word prayerfully and listen to his voice, he will teach us by his Spirit so that we can teach others.

When Jesus worked together with his disciples to serve the crowd, what was the result?

1. **They All Ate and Were Satisfied (vs. 42–44)**

Mark records a few facts to emphasize the supernatural power Jesus displayed such that no natural explanation could account for what happened, as well as to reveal the abundance of Jesus’ grace. Look at verses 42–44: “***They all ate and were satisfied, 43 and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. 44 The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.***” Some skeptics have speculated that Jesus’ preaching opened the hearts of the people who *had* brought food to share with the people around them. But if that were the case, the people would not all have eaten enough to be satisfied, and there would not have been leftovers. Jesus’ miracle before thousands of witnesses cannot be credibly denied. The fact that thousands ate shows that Jesus is not limited, and it highlights the large effect that a small number of disciples can have through bringing Jesus their five loaves and two fish. Through this event, Jesus revealed that he is our compassionate shepherd, gracious provider, and almighty Creator God. We should not limit God by our lack of faith, but pray for and expect his miraculous work.

Lest anyone think that God worked like that in the past but doesn’t do that kind of thing anymore, Francis Chan, a pastor in San Francisco, shared in a blog post from 2012:

Many of you have heard the story of what happened a year ago when we decided to do a conference here in San Francisco… In short, we were going to have hundreds of people show up in the inner city to pass out thousands of meals to the poor and homeless. A few days before the conference, the rescue mission staff had a meeting where the leader expressed concern because they had no meat and no money.  Two hours after the meeting, Trader Joe’s (the local market) called to tell us that their refrigerators had just shut down and they needed to give us all of their meat!  Shortly after, truckloads of meat came to our front door!

Well…  We are having our conference again this Friday.  We just had a staff meeting this morning and our kitchen manager expressed concern that we might not have enough food because of the amount of people coming this year.  Guess who called half an hour after our meeting.  Yes, you guessed it!  Trader Joe’s just had a power outage!!!  Are you kidding me???!!!

We are all here shaking our heads in disbelief, celebrating, and laughing!  So I just wanted to share it with the world…

Francis and his church shared Jesus’ compassionate shepherd heart to bring the gospel along with practical help to the needy in their neighborhood. When it became evident that they were lacking in resources and they brought their need to God in prayer, God provided unexpectedly and abundantly—not just once, but two years in a row. This is the God we serve.

Jesus left his throne in heaven to come to this world and become a man because he saw our suffering and wandering in darkness, and he felt our pain. Jesus wants to care for the needs of the world, and his vision to do so is through raising up compassionate shepherds who share his broken heart for lost sinners. Even though what we can offer to Jesus seems humble and insignificant compared to the great need we see, when we bring our five loaves and two fish to Jesus by faith, he can multiply abundantly our small offering to feed the U of M! Amen! Let’s accept Jesus’ words to us, “***You give them something to eat.***”