

A Gift for His Bride
Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B
Jeremiah 23:1-6; Ephesians 2:11-22; Mark 6:30-44
July 18, 2021

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

I remember for sometime after Lora and I were married, that I would continually play with my wedding ring. It felt weird. I was not used to wearing a ring at all. I had had a class ring in high school. But, I hadn't worn it in years.

If you have a wedding ring on your finger, look at it. What does it mean? Why is it there?

Yes, even now, I can look at it and remember that I am, in fact, married. I have a wonderful woman who loves me, cares for me, shares my joy and my sadness. She nurses me when I'm sick. And, I care for her when she is ill. (We did that a lot last Fall with COVID).

I remember the struggles, the pains, the arguments, the vacations, the celebrations, the graduations, the birth of Chandler, the adoption of Griffin. I remember how she has defended me, chastised me, encouraged me, and helped me be better husband, father, pastor, Christian.

Yes, that and so much more is signified by that metal circle on my finger.

It is a reminder to remember all the things wrapped up in being married.

We need these kinds of reminders. They are good to refocus us, especially when things are hard and difficult.

Our Collect this morning helps with this, "*Heavenly Father, though we do not deserve Your goodness, still You provide for all our needs of body and soul. Grant us Your*

Holy spirit that we may acknowledge Your gifts, give thanks for all Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience."

God does provide for us. In our Gospel reading, God fed the people there who were hungry. Try to imagine that scene:

If you remember, Jesus had sent out the Twelve. They went to the surrounding villages and had preached, and healed, and cast out demons. They had been heard, and they had been rejected.

Now they were back. Jesus tells them it is time for a little R and R. So, they go to a "desolate place." I don't know about you, but when I hear the word 'desolate', I think deserted, abandoned, and isolated.

There is no doubt that is what the disciples were expecting. I'm sure they were tired and needed a chance to regroup. I bet they jumped at Jesus' suggestion. Yeah, I'm sure they were planning to leave their cell phones in the boat, getting away from social media, main stream media... a chance to unplug, unwind...

Yet, as soon as they get off the boat, what do they find? The paparazzi are already there and crowding around them asking for autographs, selfies, etc.

Unfortunately, due to my celebrity status, I often have the same problem. (Yeah right).

Here's the neat thing, if you notice, it says Jesus had compassion on the people. And, He begins to teach them. He allows the disciples to rest a bit. They had just got done doing a lot of that. They had traveled and done that and this was supposed to be their vacation.

Jesus isn't just caring for the 5000 or so people who had gathered, He was caring for those close to Him, as well. What a beautiful savior.

Matthew and Luke mention that Jesus wants to get away, not just for the disciples, but because He had just heard that John the Baptizer had been beheaded by Herod.

What a glorious picture of our suffering Servant. Our suffering Savior. Even in His suffering, His mind is on those who are in need.

His heart is broken, His disciples are exhausted, the people are starving (spiritually and physically) and He does what our God does, He serves.

Wow! God be praised!

In our Old Testament reading, the prophet Jeremiah shares with us God's Word. God was concerned about the false prophets, the misleading teachers, those who led His people astray and exploited them. He says, *"I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. 4 I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, declares the Lord"* (Jeremiah 23:3-4).

God cares for His people. He sends pastors and missionaries, deaconesses and teachers, musicians and artists, nurses and doctors, farmers and herdsman, plumbers and electricians, mechanics and machinists, friends and neighbors.

We, following in the footsteps of our Lord, are called to serve, as well. Jesus cared for His disciples. He taught, so they could rest. He ministered to them and to the crowd. He healed, they rested.

But, then, something else happens. It is as if the disciples were actually learning from their Master. They show their compassion for the crowd, *"And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat"* (Mark 6:35–36).

I suppose it could have been that they were still wanting their vacation and were just trying to get rid of the people. Or, maybe they were trying to return the favor that Jesus had given to them. It was His turn to rest and the people need to go in order for that to happen.

But, I prefer to think that they were actually trying to do what they thought Jesus would have them do. Care for the people. The people were hungry.

After all, Jesus turns to the disciples and says, *"You give them something to eat."* The disciples continue to struggle with how to do what is right, *"Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?"* I don't think this was sarcasm. I think this was genuine struggle.

How often do we do the same thing? God, what should I do? How do you want me to do this? Should I do this or should I do that?

We struggle to do what God would have us do, as well. This is comforting. The disciples, who were right there with Jesus, struggled to do their best.

Would it have been wrong for them to have gone and bought the bread? I suppose not. They would have cared for the people. But, Jesus was teaching a lesson.

They wanted to go and buy the bread. But, Jesus says do it yourself. "You give them something to eat." This is all about service. It is easier to let someone else do it. It is easier, as our politicians like to do, throw money at a problem and pretend that will solve the problem.

What Jesus wants, though, is for us to do the serving. Find out what our neighbor needs and try our best to take care of it. Money is easy to give away. Time is a harder investment. Energy. Commitment. Compassion. Care. Those are even more valuable.

Jesus was deeply invested in His people, in His creation. "*He had compassion on them.*"

Jesus wanted His disciples to show the same thing. Compassion. Not 'send them away'. Not 'go buy bread'. But, to give of themselves.

As St. Paul reminds us this morning, "*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them*" (Ephesians 2:10).

We do not deserve His love. We do not deserve His compassion. We do not deserve anything good. Yet, "*He had compassion on them.*" He loves us in spite of our sinfulness, our hatefulness, our shame...

"*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast*" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

On the cross, after being beaten and humiliated, spat upon, ridiculed and hated, as He hung, nails in His hands and feet, looking down at those who had drove those nails, who had rejected and beaten Him...

“He had compassion on them.”

He prays on their behalf, *“Father forgive them, for they know not what they do”*

(Luke 23:34).

Your God loves you, in spite of yourself. It is His compassion that feeds us and forgives us.

When we come to Church, we are reminded of His love and compassion. We hear our pastor pronounce the forgiveness of our sins. That is God’s love through one He has sent.

We hear His word read and taught, as you are doing now. This is out of His compassion for you.

We receive the body and blood of our Lord, the same body and blood that was a broken and spilt on the cross, as we remember Jesus’ prayer, *“Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.”*

These are the wedding ring that God has given to you, the Church, His bride. He gives to us these gifts through the working of the Holy Spirit.

And, because He shows His compassion to us, because we are continually served by Him, cared for by Him, receiving His gifts, freely and without merit... then we, like the disciples, learn what true compassion, service, love and care looks like. And we leave this place and give it away to others who do not deserve it. To those who hurt us, to those who are hurt by others, and to all who need it, we pray, *“Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.”*

What a wonderful reminder that is. *“God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:8).

Now may the peace that passes all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ

Jesus.

Amen.



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