

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

In this day and age, when we are sick or in need of any sort of medical treatment or care, we think nothing of the ability to schedule a doctor's appointment to be treated for whatever ails us...on the other hand, getting an appointment to get to see the doctor is a whole different story...that alone will take a miracle at times. Nonetheless, we have the blessing of medical capabilities that are advancing all the time to keep us well.

In our Gospel lesson today, we hear that the disciples that Jesus had sent out two weeks ago in our Gospel lesson just before the unpleasantness of the beheading of John the Baptist, have returned to gather around Jesus. As they gathered, they told Jesus all they did and accomplished. Jesus responds to the disciples by following the 3rd Commandment as we hear it in the book of Exodus:

⁸ Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. ⁹ For six days you shall labour and do all your work. ¹⁰ But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. ¹¹ For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it. (Exodus 20:8-11)

In his response to the disciples based in this command, Jesus prescribes a retreat of sorts for the disciples. They then head off in a boat to a deserted place to rest. On the other hand, when the crowds saw where Jesus and the disciples were going, they rushed to that place ahead of Jesus and his disciples. Jesus then goes ashore and sees the great crowd. I think any of us who were attempting to "get away" from the crowds to rest...and then seeing more people when we arrive at our destination would be a bit upset and frustrated...or just plain-down angry. But when Jesus sees the crowds, he is not upset, he's not frustrated, nor is he even angry. Jesus does not see the crowd the way we would probably see the crowd, rather, he looks past his situation and he sees in that crowd the magnitude of the people's desperation to be healed. In other words, they want to see the doctor, rather they seek the healer or at the least, get an appointment to see him...the crowds seek healing and they gather around the one who heals.

Keep in mind, that the Hebrew Bible rarely mentions doctors or physicians and if they are referenced it is usually mentioned with disdain. The Hebrew word for physician literally means "healer." Nonetheless, throughout Holy Scripture, the physicians that did exist, were often from the priestly tribe of Levites. However, in the New Testament, Luke is referred to in the Epistle to the Colossians as "ἰατρὸς" (*yet-trows*), physician or one who heals.

So, looking at the crowds that gathered in anticipation of an encounter with Jesus we know that these people do not have the luxury to call a doctor or go to a clinic or a hospital. This is why they have rushed to Jesus because in their understanding He is the healer...the healer that they heard is like none they have seen to this point.

Today, as I said earlier, our Gospel lesson picks up the mission of the disciples who were sent by Jesus a couple weeks ago. However, our lesson today has left out a big chunk of the text. As the great crowd gathers around Jesus, the hour then grows late and the disciples approach Jesus and

encourage him to send the crowd away so they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat. Once again, instead of trying to get away from the crowds, Jesus then feeds the great crowd with just five loaves of bread and two fish.

After the feeding of the crowd, now comes the time of rest...or so one would think. Now Jesus sends the disciples in a boat heading for Bethsaida. While they head out ahead of Jesus, he goes off to pray, only to see the disciples struggling in the boat against the wind and the waves. Jesus then gets up and walks out on the sea to the struggling boat and tells the disciples not to be afraid, and then Jesus calms the seas. And then our Gospel lesson picks up here when the boat reaches the other side where once again the people recognize Jesus and rush in around him. This is also the place where the crowds have gathered and where they have brought their sick to be healed by the healer Jesus Christ.

Now if the feeding of the great crowd with just five loaves and two fish, and Jesus walking on the water and calming the seas has been edited out of the Gospel lesson today, why then...you may be thinking...at least I hope you are...why then am I mentioning them in this sermon today if they are not in the text. I mention them because I believe it focuses our attention on Jesus as a healer rather than Jesus the miracle worker. However, as a healer in the edited version of this chapter of Mark's Gospel, we find that when we juxtapose the edited version with the full text of this chapter, we see Jesus in that juxtaposition today constantly attempting to honor the Sabbath by keeping it holy...as he attempts to go off and pray. And when you place the feeding, the walking on the water, and the calming of the seas against the crowds rushing in on Jesus and the disciples, we see how futile Jesus' attempt to honor the Sabbath becomes.

But is this lesson really about rest or about the healing work of Jesus? Now I can stress that the focus of our lesson this morning is about taking time to remember our Sabbath, to take time off for ourselves because time off to rest is built right into our very commandments from God. But is this really the Good News...when we are already commanded to rest? After all, there is an entire list of things we ought to do and things we ought NOT do. Some could argue that it is. But is this really Good News or just common sense? If rest is the Good News for us today, well then, we rest...now what? We rest only to rise from our rest to face the work that is before us the six days of the week ahead of us...but what does this rest say about our sinful nature...does it simply go away when we rest? At the same time...I don't want to make light of the importance of the Sabbath and keeping it holy. But this brings it right back for me to ask, so, where is the Good News found today for us in this lesson of the crowds that rush in and surround Jesus?

Earlier I pointed out that Jesus, in his attempt to get away is confronted with a great crowd. Instead of facing the challenge of trying to disperse them he joins them. He is not frustrated in his desire for rest...he has not placed his desire for rest ahead of the need to be healed. He does not chase them off with his anger or ignore them because He is resting and honoring His Sabbath. It is in this moment when confronting the crowds that I see the Good News for us today.

Jesus in confronting the crowds has compassion for them. We hear that Jesus goes ashore, sees a great crowd and has *σπλαγχνίζομαι* (*splanchnēzomai*)...Jesus has compassion for them. There is something that I think is very important about this verb compassion in the context of

this lesson before us today. If I read this line, ³⁴ As [Jesus] went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them...we might think, great, Jesus had pity on the people rather than getting angry...that's nice, big deal. But the verb, compassion, when we look closer and see its content and how it is used and written in this passage, we find so much more and this is why I think it is the Good News for us today.

A verb such as compassion is an action or rather an awareness of the suffering of another coupled with the intention to help relieve that suffering. But like any verb, the action of that verb is written in a certain voice. The voice of a verb directs the reader to a subject that performs the action or the subject that is the receiver of the action. When a sentence is written in the active voice, the subject of the statement or sentence performs the action; in the passive voice, the subject receives the action. As this is written, the action of compassion is not about who receives it or gives it, compassion is written in what is known as middle voice.

In the Greek language, middle voice is used to show that the subject is part or is all of the action. In other words, the subject is both the cause and the focus, the agent and experiencer, of this verbal action of compassion. What this passage is saying is that Jesus does not only have compassion for the crowd, he is compassion. But this term, *σπλαγχνίζομαι* (*splanchnizomai*) is much more than pity, Jesus is deeply deeply moved in this passage when he encounters the crowd...meaning Jesus suffers with the crowd and because he is suffering with the crowd, He also is compassion for them. In other words, Jesus is not only the doctor who knows how to cure them, he is also the very cure for them.

As I look for a way to connect this two-part story today that is before us to each of us gathered around it, I see one common thread and that is, all are seeking Jesus...the disciples or the crowds, all seek Jesus. And as I look closely at this verb "compassion" and how the definition and the syntax literally show the Word, the action, and the emotion to be Jesus Christ, we too cannot look at the crowd from a historical perspective...because we are the crowd. We are the crowd that throughout the generations have sought Jesus Christ to heal us of the infirmity of our sin. We are the crowd that seeks Jesus to simply touch the fringe of his cloak to be healed.

And today we too gather here because we have recognized Jesus. And here today from the nave of this boat we call St. Paul Lutheran Church, the compassion of Jesus steps out before us here in this place. Once again, just as he is before these crowds in the words of this Gospel lesson, the compassion of Jesus Christ is here, in this crowd as we reach out to touch the healing and compassion that is Jesus Christ. In this crowd is much need for healing. In his compassion for us, Jesus Christ touches us in the Words of this Holy Gospel, he heals our very souls in this Holy Meal just as he fed the crowd, and he calms the storms of our souls as we are tossed about in the seas of our sin.

Today, we are the crowd that gathers but we are not dispersed or despised by Jesus, we are freely given compassion in the very being of Jesus Christ before us in this bread and wine and in this Holy Word. Today we are touched by Jesus Christ in Word and in Sacrament and we are all healed of sin and death. Today the doctor is here with us...in this gathering and He has compassion and healing for all...and we didn't even need an appointment...

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.