

The Church Is Where....

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

July 19, 2009

While the chancel area is being prepared for the presentations by our mission teams, I'm filler.

I just love it when a plan comes together and there was no plan. Today's Gospel lectionary reading and sermon title were chosen several months ago. We decided to have the mission teams share today a week ago last Friday.

Today's text starts out reporting that the disciples were gathered around Jesus sharing with him about their first road trip. The story prior to today's is an account of Jesus sending the twelve out in pairs to teach and heal in the area villages.

Will Willimon tells of a cold February afternoon when he was a young pastor that he went to visit some of his shut-ins. He reluctantly included a stop at Mary Smith's home. The last time he visited Mrs. Smith she didn't seem particularly interested in seeing him.

As he knocked on the door he noticed a note on it that read: "Please knock and simply enter. I may be unable to get to the door." So, in Willimon went and saw Mrs. Smith lying in bed. He was struck by how much frailer and thinner she appeared than the last time he visited.

When she saw him, she smiled. She seemed pleased to see him this time. They had a wonderful conversation for about an hour. As he prepared to leave, she reached out and grabbed his hand with her frail hand and said, "Preacher, I've been praying all week that somebody would come visit me. I've been praying to Jesus, to come to me and help me endure my pain, and help me handle the loneliness of these days. I awoke this morning so disappointed that Jesus had not answered my prayer. And then you came. I guess you are here in place of Jesus. You make a wonderful substitute."¹

If we had a lot more time today, I would probably want to unpack the substitute part a little and take a look at a few other possible words we could use about ourselves as followers of Christ – but the basic idea would be the same – we are the physical presence of Christ – the Body of Christ – Jesus comes into people's lives when we serve. Some substitutes – some servants – want to share with you what this summer's mission trips meant to them.

The two seniors who went on this year's trip are going to share first: Caitlin Dillehay and Mark Schmidley and then we will watch a brief powerpoint presentation. Caitlin & Mark.

While the disciples were sharing with Jesus about what had happened when they had served in his name in the area villages many people kept crowding around them – in anticipating of them doing more? To hear about their experiences? We're not really sure. What we do know is that Jesus proposed that they take a break from their sharing and serving and rest. And so they got into a boat and went to a deserted place alone.

Their alone time didn't last long however. Masses of people saw where they went and hurriedly went after them. And so, Jesus ordered his closest followers back into the boat and pushed off again in search for another

place to be refreshed, right? No, the scripture tells us that he had compassion on them – that he dug down deep into his being and offered them what of him he had to give.

Now, compassion is one of those words that most of us think we have a pretty good idea about what it means. You know, something like feeling sorry for someone else – something emotional. But it's really something more than that. Its Latin roots offer us some help. It is a suffering with another – an acting on our affection.

But, the Hebrew and Greek roots adds even a further dimension to it. And that is, that compassion emanates from deep within us. It's of the gut. We enter into people's lives when they are laid bare – we internalize their condition – when we are a compassionate people.

There are many ministries which provide us the opportunity to suffer with those who are carrying extra burdens. Those who went on one of the mission trips this summer had ample opportunity to experience this ministry of compassion. Sure, we had a pretty good time doing it for the most part. But, there were those other moments when we knew we were in the presence of something holy – something beyond ourselves – something we might not even been able to name at the time.

I'm sure I speak for everyone who went on one of the trips we'd love to have some more of you join us next summer. However, I would also want to quickly add that you don't have to go to South Dakota or Louisiana or wait until next summer to be involved in ministries of compassion. There are plenty of other opportunities in our community – both through the ministries of the church and others.

(If time) One preacher noted in one of his sermons that in this tough economy, single-parent families are particularly hard hit. He told of a single dad he knew who couldn't drive to church because his brakes went out and he didn't have enough money to fix them or to purchase the gas if the brakes did work. He usually skipped one meal a day and ate oatmeal for the others.

A small group in his neighborhood heard about the man's situation and started talking with one another about what they might do. They took turns preparing dinners for the man and his boy and sat down and ate the meal with them. They gave him movie and zoo passes so that he could take his son out. They gave him Christmas gift cards that they were planning on using on their own families. A mechanic in the group towed the man's car and took time on his day off to fix the man's brakes.²

Let's see – there's CRC breakfast and the Free Store and New Life clothing center and the meals at Broadmeadows and homeless shelters local food banks like NNEMAP and ... you get the picture.

Those who follow Christ sense people in need – you know it in your gut when someone needs someone else to suffer with them. The church, you see, is where compassion is alive – is offered – and is sought.

Let us pray.

1. William H. Willimon, Pulpit Resource, July – September, 2009, p. 16.
2. Leonard Sweet, Homiletics, July – August, 2009, p. 23.