

July 19, 2009
Lectionary 16
Mark 6:30-34, 53-56
Pr. Michael Schnell

GRACE AND PEACE BE UNTO YOU FROM GOD OUR FATHER AND THE LORD OUR SAVIOR, JESUS THE CHRIST. AMEN.

Folks, I am very well aware that this Sunday is called Jesus the Good Shepherd Sunday. But I have a problem – I have preached on this theme a great number of times and I simply don't want to do it again. So, I'm not going to. Instead, I want to address the last paragraph in our Gospel text for today.

However, that poses an additional problem. That paragraph describes a scene. In our world, "scenes" are increasingly captured by pictures as a means of communication, whether they be still photography, movies or videos conveyed by TV, DVD's or the internet. That is why the video of the young woman dying on a street in Tehran instantaneously symbolized the protest against a stolen election and political corruption. That video replaced thousands upon thousands of words about the whole bloody process.

Yet our text describing a scene only uses words words, so it may be difficult to picture the scene created by Mark in this 6th chapter of his Gospel. Therefore, let me begin by again reading the incident for you:

"And when they [Jesus and the disciples] had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret, and moored to the shore; and when they got out of the boat, immediately the people recognized him, and ran about the whole neighborhood and began to bring sick people on their pallets to anyplace where they heard he was."

Try to picture that in your mind. People running helter-skelter in all directions, bumping into each other; tripping over each other in their rush to get to family, friends, or neighbors who were ill; lifting children in their arms; guiding those filled with demons; juggling mats as two or more people pick up a third who is not able to walk.

Imagine the noise! "Watch out..." "Let me through!" "Help me!"

Twisted limbs, broken bones, unseeing eyes, weeping wounds, crazed minds - all this and more is brought to Jesus in a mad-house rush. People are laid or dropped at Jesus' feet and they reach up to touch the hem of his cloak.

It was not like here at church. There was no quiet in this scene, no beauty, no sense of propriety. There was only the urgent rush to get to Jesus in order to get a healing.

And Mark does not tell us specifically what Jesus does about this. We don't know if he reaches out to the children. We don't hear what he says. Yet respond Jesus did. *"And as many as touched [the hem of his cloak] were made well."*

Mark is making a point. He wants us to see this wild, desperate, crowd of people running to Jesus for healing with their lives in their eyes, their hearts in their mouths, staking everything on Jesus responding to their need. And why – why does Mark want us to see that scene? Because that scene shows us what faith looks like. Faith, in every instance, reaches out for wholeness.

The people Mark describes are meant to invite us to wrap our arms around each other, to lift each other up, and to come to Christ for healing. Even more, the story both invites and instructs us to be about the business of helping to heal others. We are called to be agents of reconciliation and healing in a world filled with hatred and violence, sickness and brokenness.

The church at its best has always been like that. From the earliest times to today, the church that has been true to its mission has always been the church that brings wholeness to people as part of its mission. Last week Pastor Miller told us that the execution of John the Baptist tells us we are called to a prophetic ministry of justice. Today, Mark tells us that the other side of our mission is to be agents of healing and wholeness.

Our congregation carries out that kind of ministry. An example is the Lakeview Food Pantry. Dia and Scott Johnson,

James Perez and my wife, Rita distributed food there this past Friday evening. Rita told me the last person in the line of people receiving food was a woman. Rita offered her selections of fruits and veggies and among the items the woman wanted were bananas. Rita removed one banana from the bunch she gave the woman because, as she told the woman, “its end is squishy.” “That’s OK,” the woman told Rita. “Would you mind if I ate it now?” “She was hungry,” Mike,” Rita told me. “She could not wait.” That is a ministry of making people whole.

And it is not just individuals in congregations that do this. Other expressions of the church also carry out this ministry. Some of you know that I worked 16 years for Lutheran Social Services of Illinois or, as we called it in shorthand, LSSI. LSSI is an ELCA social service agency which means it is owned by you and me. It is dedicated to helping people find wholeness in their lives and has ministries spread over the entirety of the State of Illinois.

In the lobby of the main office of LSSI in Peoria was a large mural made of handmade tiles. The central tile of that mural showed a garbage can into which words were pouring, words like trust, **love**, **family**, **childhood**, and **innocence**. Beneath that garbage can were four tiles, each with one word, giving this sentence: “You threw me away!”

A woman made that mural of tiles. As a young teenager she survived sex abuse within her family, but had never been helped to deal with what had been done to her as a young girl.

Getting close to that mural, one could see that the tile with the word “me” in it had been broken. The therapist who fired that tile dropped it when she took it out of the kiln. She apologized profusely when she told the woman what had happened. The woman looked at her broken and glued-together tile and said to the therapist, “No. Don’t apologize. This is better. My life was broken, but you helped me put it back together.”

That is the same kind of work Jesus did. He may have done it more quickly, but it is the same ministry. This is what Mark is telling us. Christ calls us to help people find wholeness in their lives and to support others who do the same thing. So let us be about it.

Amen.

THE PEACE OF GOD WHICH PASSES ALL UNDERSTANDING, KEEP YOUR HEARTS AND MINDS THROUGH CHRIST JESUS, OUR LORD. AMEN.