

***“Walking In Someone Else’s Shoes”***

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**Overbrook Presbyterian Church**

**30<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**October 28, 2018**

**First Scripture Lesson: Deuteronomy 8:11-18**

<sup>11</sup>Take care that you do not forget the Lord your God, by failing to keep his commandments, his ordinances, and his statutes, which I am commanding you today. <sup>12</sup>When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, <sup>13</sup>and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, <sup>14</sup>then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, <sup>15</sup>who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid wasteland with poisonous snakes and scorpions. He made water flow for you from flint rock, <sup>16</sup>and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good. <sup>17</sup>Do not say to yourself, “My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth.” <sup>18</sup>But remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, so that He may confirm His covenant that He swore to your ancestors, as He is doing today.

**Second Scripture Lesson: Mark 6:30-34**

<sup>30</sup>The apostles gathered around Jesus and told Him all that they had done and taught. <sup>31</sup>He said to them, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. <sup>32</sup>And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. <sup>33</sup>Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. <sup>34</sup>As He went ashore, He saw a great crowd; and He had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things.



**Sermon: *Walking In Someone Else’s Shoes***

This short passage takes place just before the feeding of the 5000 and just after a whole lot of activity and a few pretty well-known stories from Jesus’ life. To get the full force of what Jesus says here, we should go back and look at what has just happened to Him and the disciples.

In Chapter 5, Jesus heals the Gerasene demoniac and then gets in a boat and crosses the sea of Galilee. When He gets to the other side, He is surrounded by a crowd of people, gathered for all sorts of reasons: to be healed, to be taught, to worship, just to see what all the hub-bub was about, to witness the spectacle of celebrity. One of them, a leader of the synagogue named Jairus falls at his feet to beg Jesus to come and heal his sick daughter.

Along the way to meet that request, a woman who has suffered a flow of blood for 12 years touches Him and Jesus stops to talk with her and cure her. Now, it’s important to note that the crowd of onlookers has not dissipated. When Jesus is touched He begins to look for the person who touched Him, but His disciples say essentially, ‘Are you kidding me? Look at this crowd? Everyone is touching you!’.

After Jesus heals the hemorrhaging woman and Jairus’ daughter, He travels back to His hometown. Surely this trip home will provide a respite from all the crazy. But no, the folks He grew up around still remember him as Joe and Mary’s boy, the kid who ate paste in Vacation Bible School and used his dad’s electric razor

to shave the family dog. He is dismissed as “that kid we used to know” only now grown up with no job, no home, and delusions of messianic grandeur. No miracles were done there, not because Jesus had no power there, but because no one turned out to give Him a chance.

Then Jesus travels from village to village, teaching and healing. All the while He is sending out the disciples, in pairs, to do the same. They are to go out and preach, teach, anoint, cast out demons, and heal the sick.

Then, word comes that King Herod has murdered Jesus’ cousin, John the Baptist. And this underscores how dangerous it can be for a teacher and evangelist, especially one who takes on the power of the throne. The disciples are tasked with retrieving John’s body and taking Him to be buried.

So for Jesus and the disciples, this is a story of travel, and work, followed by more travel, and more work, facing the cynicism of your home town, dealing with the tragic, unjust death of a family member, planning and attending a funeral, and all the while the crowds of people who need something or want something or just want to be close to your celebrity, never lets up. This all builds to about a 9.0 on their collective “Stress-O-Meter.”

This is what vacations were made for. And Jesus says to the disciples, let’s go away for a few days. You need your rest, we all do really, and this would be a good time to reconnect with God and each other. I want to hear about your missionary journeys, what all you did and who all you met. Maybe a game of touch football and some time spent laying on the beach with our toes in the sand, just listening to the waves lap at the shore will do us all some good. We need a Sabbath.

So, they get in a boat, and slip away, unnoticed. Or so they think. When they land on the other side, what do they find, but more crowds!

You’ve had this happen, right? Well, maybe not with the disciples and the boat and the crowds, but you’ve probably been in this kind of situation before. You wake up in the morning (too early) and your kid remembers that he volunteered you to bake a dozen cookies for Teacher Appreciation Day, which as luck would have it, is today. You spend your day at work putting out small fires and can’t get to the big project that needs your attention. You get home from a rough day of work and the phone rings. You hang-up the phone, and your children have a crisis that needs to be resolved right now. You just got comfortable in bed and headed towards sleep, when the baby starts crying.

And then when you finally get a break to slip away and relax ... your e-mail inbox explodes with some serious work problem that just can’t wait! Everyone needs time to rest and re-energize. And when life intrudes just when you’ve taken a break, it can be supremely frustrating. I think that is where Jesus was in our reading from Mark.

But Jesus does something here in this story that I’m not sure many of us could have managed: He pauses his time away with the disciples to reach out to these people who are hungry to hear the word of God and most likely, to receive miracles of healing and maybe even just to see a celebrity of the time. And we know this story as the beginning of the more famous story of Jesus’ feeding the 5000. But before He feeds them, Mark tells us He sacrifices His period of rest and relaxation to spend time with them, because He has *compassion* for them.

When we hear the word “compassion,” we tend to think “pity.” And one might fairly ask, what’s pity got to do with this? But within compassion, there is a healthy dose of empathy, or the ability to understand

someone else's situation. Frederich Buechner wrote that "Compassion is the sometimes fatal capacity for feeling what it's like to live inside somebody else's skin. It is the knowledge that there can never really be any peace and joy for me until there is peace and joy finally for you, too."<sup>1</sup>

Which reminds me of Atticus Finch from *To Kill A Mockingbird*, when he tells his daughter Scout: "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view ... until you climb into his skin and walk around in it."<sup>2</sup>

Compassion emerges from making the effort to try to understand another person's circumstances. Why might they be doing what they are doing? How might they be feeling? And that's what we see Jesus do here. In this moment when He *needs* rest and Sabbath, He could have seen these 5000+ people waiting for Him on the shore as an interruption, an inconvenience, a "caravan," you might say, of bad people with bad intentions. But instead, Jesus puts Himself in *their* shoes; tries to see this from *their* perspective. And when He does, His concern becomes not about His own need for rest, but about their need for spiritual and physical nourishment. His compassion drives Jesus to put the needs of others before His own.

In our modern context, where what *I* need is most important; where the "ends seem to justify the means" and whatever makes me wealthy or powerful or privileged or safe, is acceptable - even if it hurts you; Jesus' attitude of compassion towards others - of making the effort to put himself into their shoes and understand their situation, is radical.

Jesus saw the crowds coming towards Him and rather than putting up walls or looking for something with which to defend himself, He put himself in their shoes and recognized that they were simply sheep in need of a shepherd.

Remember last week when the rich man asked Jesus what He had to do to inherit eternal life, Matthew tells us that "Jesus looking at him, loved him?"<sup>3</sup> How easy it would have been to see the man as just another rich person trying to utilize their power and privilege to buy eternity, or as just another person imposing upon Him to have their needs met. How easy is it to see only the imposition and the inconvenience? But Jesus chose compassion; putting Himself in the shoes of the other and walk around in them for a while.

And this wasn't a departure from the way Jesus did things. Compassion was at the core of everything He did. He fed people not because they deserved it, but because they were hungry. He healed people not because they had earned it, but because they were sick. He forgave people not because they were so good, but in spite of the fact that they were so bad. He loved people not because they were so loveable, but because they were God's children.

That's what compassion looks like. Compassion sees past the worldly labels and the political motivations and the conspiracy theories and the fears about what might happen and the prejudices about who "they" are, and steps into their shoes to try to understand their situation, how they feel, what they might be experiencing. It's not about what scares *me*, it's about what *they* might be afraid of. It's not about what *I* need, it's about what *they* need.

This is the message of Christ. Jesus died and was resurrected and through that singular historic event, God has worked-out our salvation. Eternity is no longer a worry for the believer. We know that our eternity is with God. But Jesus spent a lot of His time talking about the here and now; working to help people understand that our world is communal; that we are here to care for and support one another; not to be

in competition with one another for who can collect the most toys or earn the most accolades, but to make sure that everyone has enough for today.

That requires compassion. It requires us to work for justice, to live boldly, care without limit, love unreservedly, and share generously.

In a few moments, we are going to come forward to put our pledges in the basket on the communion table. It is an act of commitment; an act of courage; and act of faith. We do so not because of a compelling argument that says we should. We do so not because the church or the ministries of the church have impressed upon us how great is their need or how great is our responsibility. In the final analysis, we come forward and dedicate the gifts God has given us to the work to which God has called us, because the church is doing God's Kingdom Building work in the world and we need to be a part of it; because God has not judged us harshly for our quirks and our sins and our poor choices. No, in all those things, God has shown us compassion.

To God be all glory, honor, power, and dominion, in this world, and in the world that is to come. Amen.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Buechner, Frederick. *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC*. Harper & Row, 1973, pg. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Lee, Harper. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Popular Library Edition, Popular Library, 1962, pg. .34

<sup>3</sup> Mark 10:17-22, NRSV