



Lakeside Sermons

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina
Jody C. Wright, Senior Minister

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THE NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Time for Compassion?
II Samuel 7:1-11; Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

"Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while," Jesus said to his disciples. That sounds like reasonable and welcome advice to those of us who like to "get away from it all" and relax every once in a while. Yet, to the disciples who had just returned from their preaching and healing tour, who were all pumped up and excited about that they had done, who were eager to keep the adrenalin flowing and get moving again, such a suggestion must have sounded like a call to retreat. They were on a roll. They had found their rhythm. They had their groove on and now was not the time to go off by themselves, debrief, and sing "Kum Bah Yak" until the stars lulled them to sleep. Sure they were tired after all of that travel and preaching and healing. But they were pumped! They wanted to keep going. They were on fire! "No time to tarry here, no time to wait for you. No time to tarry here, for I'm on my journey home." Yet, Jesus was insistent, so they piled into the boat and went away to a deserted place.

How would you describe your deserted place of choice? Where do you want to go when you're tired and need a little R&R? Is it a cottage by the beach where you can swing in a hammock and be lulled into a nap by the waves crashing onto the shore? Is it a cabin by a lake where a busy afternoon means putting worms on a hook and throwing the line out into the water? Perhaps you prefer higher territory and think the ideal spot is a house in the mountains, shaded by ancient oak and maple trees, where a good book and the song of birds is all you need to forget the cares of the world. We all have a deserted place in mind, even if we never seem to make it there. For most of us, I suspect that Jesus' suggestion to go away to a deserted place sounds like a good idea. It does to me.

If you will read carefully between the lines in Mark's story, you will find a "Gotcha!" Scribes and Pharisees frequently set scriptural traps for Jesus, but this time, Jesus sets one for us. A deserted place for Jesus was anything but a five star resort with all the amenities. In fact, despite what Jesus says, a deserted place was hardly a place to rest. Professor Karoline Lewis reminds us that after Jesus was baptized, the Spirit directed him to a deserted place where he was tempted and lived with wild beasts and survived only

because he was tended to by angels. She suggests that a deserted place is the place where only what is essential remains. She says,

The deserted places are often the places we avoid and yet know somewhere deep down they are necessary places, truthful places. They are not just “time to get away” places. They are not just “we all need a break” places. They force us to recognize what’s necessary. What’s absolutely needed. And who will truly be there when everyone else walks away. And so Jesus takes his disciples to a deserted place not for a well-deserved respite, but to teach them what he learned in the wilderness—and what will be essential for them to remember when it comes to their role in bringing about the Kingdom of God.¹

During my freshman year in college, I had a poster on my wall that said, “God is in heaven and all is right with the world.” It was a beautiful poster featuring a panoramic view of a gorgeous landscape and plenty of clear blue sky. Granted, when you are in that cottage at the beach, the cabin by the lake, or the house in the mountains, that poster seems spot on. You are away from the cares that so often perplex you and it seems that God is in his proper place watching over everything, so the world is good. But we all know what it is like to be on top of the world, to have everything going just right, and to feel like life has lined up perfectly. We also know what it is like for life to begin to come apart at the seams, for everything to go wrong, and to feel like life has let us down. At those times it feels like God is out of place and we are out of sorts.

The disciples learned quickly that even in a truly deserted place, the absence of need is short lived. They barely had time to tell Jesus the good things that had happened while they were out preaching and healing before this deserted place was filling up with people with all kinds of needs. They didn’t even have time to say “No time!” before they were besieged with people and needs. In a deserted place, the essentials become apparent real fast.

Jesus had taken his closest friends to this spot for a reason. He wanted them to realize the resources they had on hand even when it appeared that no other help was available. In our Gospel lesson, we skipped over some of the verses in this narrative, namely the story we know as “The Feeding of the

¹Karoline Lewis, “Letting Go,” *Dear Working Preacher*, (July 15, 2018); available online at: <https://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=5198>.

Five Thousand.” You will remember that the disciples were overwhelmed by such a crowd of folks. When it was getting late and people were getting hungry, they came to Jesus and said, “Okay, Lord, it’s time to call it a day. Say the benediction and send these folks away so they can find some food on their way home.”

Jesus was in teaching mode, however, and he said to them, “No, you feed them.” Looking over the crowd which included five thousand men plus women and children, they said, “No way, Jesus! Where can we find food to feed this crowd? How would we pay for it? All we have come up with is five loaves and two fish. What are they to such a multitude of people?” And Jesus said, “Watch me!”

It was a teaching moment when Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, blessed them, and passed them to the people. It was a teaching moment when all they had in hand was enough to satisfy one growing boy. It was a teaching moment when they gathered up the leftovers and filled twelve baskets!

You probably remember the beloved folk story, “Stone Soup.”

Once upon a time, somewhere in post-war Eastern Europe, there was a great famine in which people jealously hoarded whatever food they could find, hiding it even from their friends and neighbors. One day a wandering soldier came into a village and began asking questions as if he planned to stay for the night.

"There's not a bite to eat in the whole province," he was told. "Better keep moving on."

"Oh, I have everything I need," he said. "In fact, I was thinking of making some stone soup to share with all of you." He pulled an iron cauldron from his wagon, filled it with water, and built a fire under it. Then, with great ceremony, he drew an ordinary-looking stone from a velvet bag and dropped it into the water.

By now, hearing the rumor of food, most of the villagers had come to the square or watched from their windows. As the soldier sniffed the "broth" and licked his lips in anticipation, hunger began to overcome their skepticism.

"Ahh," the soldier said to himself rather loudly, "I do like a tasty stone soup. Of course, stone soup with cabbage—that's hard to beat."

Soon a villager approached hesitantly, holding a cabbage he'd retrieved from its hiding place, and added it to the pot.

"Capital!" cried the soldier. "You know, I once had stone soup with cabbage and a bit of salt beef as well, and it was fit for a king."

The village butcher managed to find some salt beef . . . and so it went, through potatoes, onions, carrots, mushrooms, and so on, until there was indeed a delicious meal for all.

Jesus taught his disciples that any deserted place is a good place for a version of stone soup!

The view from plenty and abundance is that God is in heaven and all is right with the world because at that moment in time, all is right with OUR world, but that perspective does not take into account the world that so many other people inhabit. Moreover, that is not God's world and that is not how God treats his world.

The book of II Samuel gives us a glimpse into the nature of God. King David had just finished building a fine home for himself, but he felt bad that there was no permanent temple in which God might dwell. He spoke to the prophet Nathan, hoping to get permission to build God a nice house as well. Through the prophet, God reminded the king that from the time the Hebrew children left Egypt until that moment, God's presence had been signaled, not by a grand and imposing temple, but by a tent or tabernacle. God had hovered over his people as a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. God had pulled up stakes and moved whenever his people pulled up stakes and moved. God was a roving God. God was on the move, constantly keeping up with or leading his people. God was never sitting on a throne in the heavens. He was always moving amongst his people. God was always singing, "No time to tarry here, no time to wait for you. No time to tarry here, for I'm on my journey home." God's home is among his people.

No doubt the disciples wanted to share their ministry successes with Jesus and then plan for the next series of camp meeting and mission trips.

Jesus, however, wanted them to realize that they must always be ready for every day was a day of ministry and every person was an opportunity for compassion.

As we think about who we are on this warm summer day in the middle of July, we can be discouraged because there are not more bodies in the pews. We can get frustrated that some of the systemic problems in our community persist. We can become agitated over the partisan bickering that controls much government action day by day. We can begin to despair over the tension that exists between nations of the world. We can even begin to wonder whether or not God even cares anymore.

Or, we can recognize that every once in a while God leads us to a deserted place where we have to look around and within ourselves and see what truly remains when all of the trappings we are used to are gone. What remains when we are faced with a ministry opportunity and our resources are limited? What remains when government budgets are stretched thin but needs grow abundant? What remains when civility and compassion are abandoned? What remains when the ministry of the Gospel of Jesus Christ becomes first and foremost a personal calling? What remains when God taps us on the shoulder and asks, "Whom shall I send?"

In those moments, we discover that the one thing we always have is time for compassion. When Jesus got out of the boat and went onshore surrounded by a mass of people with all sorts of needs, he did not feel fear or anxiety or inadequacy. He felt compassion. When we have compassion, God provides everything else that is needed. When we have compassion, God enables us to meet the needs before us. When we have compassion, we have time to do anything in the world that needs doing. When we have compassion, heaven comes to earth, and all will be well with the world.

Find your deserted place. Recognized the gifts and resources God has given to you. Then look around at all the people and opportunities God has placed in your life and enjoy the time for compassion!

July 22, 2018

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

O God, who speaks to us and who hears us speak, who hears our pleas and calls us by name, indeed we come to you knowing that your provision and mercy to your children will never fail. We thank you, O Lord, that you have called us to be your people and have given us one another for encouragement and companionship. We thank you that even when we run from you, like a loving parent, you wait patiently to welcome us home. We thank you for the abundance of your blessings and all the ways that you nurture and sustain us. Come into our waiting hearts and replace our emptiness and insecurities with your presence and peace. Create within us a longing to know you and the ability to discern your voice when you call.

Forgive us, Holy God, when you call and we do not hear, when we are so distracted by all the noise and the busyness around us that we fail to recognize your voice. Forgive us when our ears are not tuned to hear the messages you have for us. Forgive us most of all when we hear your voice and the cries of those who suffer around us and we are too preoccupied or apathetic to respond. Teach us to make space for solitude and silence in our lives and in our hearts, and help us to listen attentively for the quiet murmurings of your Spirit.

Merciful God, we pray not only for ourselves but also for those in our community, and around the world who live in need and in despair. We pray for those who are sick and ask that you empower us to bring healing. We pray for those who suffer abuse and violence and ask that you equip us to be peacemakers among them. We pray for those who mourn and for those who are lonely and ask that you help us to bring them comfort. In circumstances where chaos and conflict reign, may we live as ministers of reconciliation. For those whose lives are stifled by suffering and hopelessness, may we be messengers of your hope and peace. Empower us to be creative and diligent in meeting their needs, drawing not from our own strength or merit, but from trusting in your mercy and power. Renew us, Gracious God, that we might be prepared to serve, to pray, and to love, in the name of the One who gives us abundant life for today and hope for the days to come, even Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Elizabeth J. Edwards
Associate Minister