

Reverend Robin Sherman  
Friendship United Church  
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Mark 6: 30-34, 53-56

I think it was the girl group “The GoGo’s” who had a hit song a number of years ago that went something like this, “vacations all I ever wanted; vacations having to get away” or something like that.

The disciples have returned from their missions. They had been sent out in two’s to teach and heal with all the same authority as Jesus had. The job had become so big that more were needed to get it all done. Jesus had told them to go with nothing but the clothes on their backs. He reminded them that some people would not listen to them, some would reject them but they should just shake the dust from their feet and move on.

Well they have returned, tired but exhilarated, anxious to share with Jesus all they had done and all they had seen. But they return to a somewhat chaotic scene. You see Jesus’ status had reached a point of frenzy. It is hard for us to understand what it must be like to be bombarded with people shouting at you, pulling at you, begging you for help, every moment of every day.

Today, many of us might be ashamed to admit that we are celebrity watchers, but you have to admit that you do sneak a peek at those rag magazines at the grocery check outs; we do give a double take when we think we see a celebrity; we have all had some time when we thought it would be nice just for a moment to have that kind of celebrity in our own lives – to be rich and famous.

In this past while many of us have watched as the TV reports have plastered the life of Michael Jackson all over our screens. I could not help but draw some comparisons. Michael Jackson could not go anywhere, anywhere without being bombarded with people calling his name, pulling at him, pushing him, demanding his attention. From the time he was a child – beginning at the age of 5 – he never knew what it was like to live without being pushed from place to place with security all around, reporters all around, cameras all around. Even in death he could not escape the crowds. We all think we know him, we have all formed opinions about him – good or bad – but we do not **know** him.

Think of how it would be today for Jesus. Would we have believed his claims; would he have carried a blackberry and been followed by camera crews? Would the disciples have been seen as his body guards? Would anyone be allowed to be within 10 feet of him? Would we have been as quick to believe his miracles or would they have been seen as tricks set up to amaze and captivate us. It’s funny how we cannot fathom the **reality** of Jesus, how he really lived. We have created a picture in our minds but we cannot know what it felt like to be there; what it smelt like; who was there with him.

If it weren't that we have had 2,000 years of hearing the stories we might not believe them. If it weren't that it happened before we became so educated in trickery and mind altering contraptions we might not have ever believed in Jesus and his ministry. Would Jesus have survived the computer age?

All interesting things to ponder but that takes us off track. Today, our scripture places us around the Sea of Galilee and the disciples have returned to tell Jesus of their adventures. We don't know how long they have been away but we can assume it was long enough to be happy to be home, to see Jesus again and to report. But they cannot get any time with him. The people will not back off and so Jesus suggests they take a vacation together. A time alone, set apart, to come down from their experience.

Jesus takes the disciples to a deserted place and just when they think they will get their time alone, the multitudes find them. To the disciples this must have been a moment of great frustration but Jesus looks upon the people with compassion, like a shepherd looking over his sheep. He looked upon them with compassion.

There are two pieces of important information here. First they have gone to a deserted place. We all have times and places in our lives when we feel deserted. Those dark and lonely places, we all have them; some of us are in them right now with the loss of a loved one, the inability to leave an abusive situation, depression, the inability to kick a habit, drugs, alcohol and other addictions, a dead end job. Those dark and lonely places. The writer of Mark wants us to recognize the deserted place is where Jesus will look upon us with compassion.

Second, He will not turn us away. He will comfort us and heal us in these deserted places like a shepherd with a lost sheep. When we are in these places in our lives it is hard to feel loved but the truth is Jesus will take us in his arms and hold us close even when we cannot immediately feel it, he is there. He will not leave us in this place alone.

There are so many who need us to meet them in these dark and lonely places; so many who are crying out for help. Do we recognize them or do we see them as trouble makers? Do we turn to them with compassion as shepherds or send them away dismissing them and their problems? It is difficult to know. In our world today we have to be careful not to put ourselves in dangerous situations but there are ways to help and things we can do. Some of you are involved in those things both in and outside of our church. Habitat for Humanity, Amnesty International, World Peace organizations, Mission and Service Fund, Environmental groups, Restorative Justice and Prison volunteers.

This past week many of us had the opportunity to help with Vacation Bible School. Although the theme was Pirates and the Veggie Tales The Pirates Who Don't Do Anything they soon learned that they could do all things. The theme bible verse was from Philippians: I CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST BECAUSE HE GIVES ME STRENGTH.

There were many times throughout each day when we would have loved to go to some deserted place for quiet time and to ask for strength to get us leaders through the day but we also recognised the gift we were given to be shepherds to those sheep. There is no doubt that some of those children will find themselves one day in that deserted place. It is our hope that they will remember some part of this week that will help them through. It is our hope that they will know that Jesus is there for them always and so are we.

We meet one another in the deserted places and the crowded places; the important thing to remember is we are never alone.

Thanks be to God!