

## “We Meet People’s Needs”

Mark 6:30-44

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

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Everyone had gathered around the table. The chairperson called the meeting to order. In many ways it was like any other church board meeting. The minutes from the previous meeting were approved. The financial report was given and questions were answered. There were reports about things that were happening around the church. A few items of business needed to be taken care of.

The thing that was different, however, was that one of the members of the board was particularly grumpy. Now, to be fair, it was a person who had a bent toward negativity. So there were some people at the meeting who simply rolled their eyes and said, “There they go again.”

But others around the table couldn’t help but notice that, while not totally out of character, this also wasn’t normal behavior...something *was* different.

Among those others was the pastor who, upon the meeting being adjourned, found their way to that individual and simply said, “Are you okay tonight?” In a tumble of words, out came the revelation that this person’s spouse had been hospitalized and, in fact, had undergone serious surgery that very day. But being a person who believed in keeping their commitments, this board member had left their spouse’s bedside and come to the meeting.

“I’m sorry you are going through this.” “Thank you for being here.” “May I come visit tomorrow?” Those three sentences passed from the pastor to the board member and with each one, their shoulders let down a little, some stress released from their face, and their mood began to change.

It is amazing [as Kara reminded us in her children’s moment] the difference paying attention to others can make.

And isn’t that really what’s at the heart of this story?

Too often we read this *only* as a miracle story, as if it is *only* telling us something about Jesus’ unique power, power that is out of *our* reach. And yet, when we really listen to it, what we see Jesus doing is paying attention to those around him and then meeting their needs.

The story begins, “The apostles gathered around Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, ‘Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while’” (Mark 6:30-31a, NRSV).

Often we read right past this. But if we pause here long enough, then we can't help but ask the question, "What were they telling him about?" Flip back in your Bible, earlier in this chapter, and you will hear that Jesus had sent the disciples out in pairs to do the same work that he was doing. They were preaching and teaching, healing and casting out demons.

So, when our reading begins, that is the context. The disciples have returned, they have gathered back together, and they are all reporting in. They are sharing tales of what they did on Jesus' behalf. They are talking about the experiences they had, the ways they were able to make a difference. Perhaps they were getting some suggestions for things they could do better the next time.

And because Jesus was paying attention to them, he knew what they needed. He knew that the work they had done was exhausting. He knew that it was hard to find quiet time when so many people needed so many things. And so, after hearing the stories they shared, Jesus looked at them and said, "Why don't you go rest?"

But it wasn't only those closest to him, those he knew well, to whom he paid attention. A great crowd had gathered. Perhaps they were there because they had heard of Jesus. Perhaps they were there because they had also heard about what the disciples were doing. But they had gathered and they were not to be deterred.

So, Jesus turned his attention to them. And he saw them...really saw them. Mark tells us, "he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he began to teach them many things" (Mark 6:34, NRSV).

He had compassion for them. He didn't just see their need or show care for them. But he joined them in their reality.

And, when the disciples reminded him that it was time for dinner, he did more than just bring his teaching to a close. He - along with the disciples - met their needs. He knew that they could just send the people away. But he also knew the importance of feeding people, of tending to their bodies as well as their souls. And so he invited the disciples to join him in responding to the needs of all those gathered.

Of course, the disciples (much like us) seem a little overwhelmed by the task. Let's just send them home. But how will we feed so many? Is this really how we should spend our resources, if we even have enough?

We understand the disciples' questions, don't we? We know what it is to want to help, but not be sure how. We know what it is to focus on scarcity rather than abundance. We know what it is to just be too tired to care anymore.

But as followers of Jesus, we also know what it is to feel that pull in our hearts that causes us to look again at someone we first turned away from...that pull that asks us to listen to their story and not just write it for them...that pull that reminds us to invite them

into relationship. And we know that pull that causes us to remember that we are each others' keepers, that we do have a role in meeting people's needs.

I wonder what would happen if we each made the commitment to pay attention?

What if we looked in the eyes of the server at our favorite restaurant, the clerk at the grocery store, the person on the corner holding a sign that says, "Hungry. Anything will help"?

What if we looked in the eyes of our co-workers, our friends, our spouse, our children, our parents?

And what if we then slowed down enough to listen to them, to believe them, and to respond to their needs?

And in doing so, what if we discovered that we, too, can show compassion...that we, too, have resources to share...that we, too, can make a difference in the midst of difficult situations?

Mark ends this story writing, "And all ate and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish" (Mark 6:42-43, NRSV).

Because that's the other thing. Kindness grows kindness. Compassion grows compassion. Generosity grows generosity.

When we participate in the compassionate work of Jesus, we come to discover that there is enough and even more. When we - all of us together - live in the ways of Jesus, when we do the work of meeting people's needs, we come to discover the resources are abundant, our gifts are plentiful, and God's love is everlasting. Amen.