

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

³⁰ The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹He 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. ³²And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. ³³Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. ³⁴As 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...

⁵³ When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. ⁵⁴When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, ⁵⁵and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the market-places, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

Overtime Pay

Summary Statement: When we address the needs of others, we become more aware of our needs and better able to distinguish between what we *want* and what we truly *need*.

If I asked everyone here, "What was your favorite subject in Elementary School?" I bet you'd all give the same answer: Recess. Recess was what taught us how to tell time; you looked at that oversized clock in the classroom and count the minutes, then the seconds, until recess. And the way you can tell that recess was your favorite subject is because you *didn't* pay attention to time while you were enjoying recess, and when the bell rang and recess was over, you were in no rush to get back to the classroom (unless you were the kid that always got picked on during recess).

Human beings were made to take breaks. Our bodies need rest, which is why God gave us the night time. Our minds need rest, too, which is why God gave us the Sabbath. Educators know that kids need to take breaks; that's why they give them recess. Businesses know that employees need breaks; that's why they have vacations and holiday parties and other celebrations. Moms and dads need breaks; that's why there are babysitters and grandparents. As much as we may enjoy parenting, or pasturing, or teaching or learning, or playing music, or whatever our vocation happens to be, we reach a point when we can no longer keep our focus, where we can no longer find joy in what we're doing – by about 10 p.m. I find that my attention span is reduced to zero in tasks like writing a sermon. Why? Because I'm getting tired and I want to play, not work. I want recess! I want to climb on the jungle gym or play on the swings, or at least open a game of Minesweeper or something on the laptop and see how far I can get before I hit a bomb, and then I want to pray and go to sleep.

Jesus understood that it was important to rest, though I wonder if he got enough rest – that's why he was able sleep in a crowded boat on a stormy lake. That's why he snuck away from the crowds early in the morning to go pray. Maybe that's why he spent so much time with fishermen – they could always hoist anchor and get away from the crowds for awhile. Jesus knew that it was important for his disciples to also get some rest; they were putting in a lot of overtime as well, healing the sick and casting out demons (I would imagine that's pretty exhausting). That's why Jesus said to his disciples, "Come away to a deserted place where you can rest awhile."

But a funny thing happens on their way to that deserted place; a crowd figures out where he's going and the place they were going isn't deserted anymore. So much for rest and relaxation. Compassion gets the

better of Jesus, and he goes back into ministry mode. After he has taught the crowd many things and it's getting late, the disciples try to remind Jesus of the original reason they had come to this place that was supposed to be deserted; they say, "Lord, this is a deserted place, and the hour is late – send this crowd home so they can get some dinner, and even though Jesus was aware of how weary his disciples were he won't let them off the hook. Instead he tells them, You feed them, which they do, with five loaves and two fish. The story gets even more humorous as Jesus instructs the disciples to go back across the lake, running into a storm on the way, and then running into another crowd on the other side of the lake. They've just had an ALL NIGHTER, AND NOW THERE'S A NEW CROWD GATHERING ON THE OTHER SIDE. Can you imagine what this group of tired disciples looked like when the people start lining up with their sick and their crippled waiting for Jesus to heal them?

BUT JESUS CAN'T HELP HIMSELF; HE IS OVERCOME BY COMPASSION. It's interesting: the Greek phrase that's translated "moved by compassion" literally means "to have one's bowels yearn." That doesn't translate well into modern English but it gets the point across that compassion is a feeling that overwhelms the entire body. It's a powerful emotion felt in one's gut. Jesus, despite his own desire for a little rest, is overcome with this gut feeling that keeps him going like the Energizer Bunny, teaching and feeding a crowd and rescuing his disciples from a sinking ship and then healing another crowd on the other side of a lake. Compassion is what keeps Jesus going despite his exhaustion. What keeps the disciples going? I suppose if it wasn't compassion it was their devotion to Jesus.

Too often we, the disciples of Jesus, serve others because we feel that's what we're supposed to do as disciples rather than truly being moved by compassion. It's far too easy for us to confine our compassion to shaking our head, saying, "What a shame," and walking away telling ourselves that someone else will take care of the problem or that the problem is so big that there's no point in trying to address it. We don't have the gut reaction that Jesus had. It's far too easy for us to turn the boat around when we see a needy crowd gathering on the beach, to find a different port where we need not be bothered by the masses. We may take a sigh and say, "Well, as a Christian I'm supposed to do something." My plea to you this morning is for you to be a disciple. Even if you are doing it just because Jesus is doing it. You need to do it until you feel human suffering in your gut so that your response not just be out of obligation as a Christians but because you really do care deeply, because it upsets your stomach to see suffering, and you are driven to address it even when you only have five loaves and two fish.

Because as we engage in helping the poor and the sick, as we instruct the world about God's amazing love for them, as we help others weather the storms of life, we understand their needs more clearly. And when we understand their needs more clearly, we understand our own needs more clearly. By this I mean that you are better able to distinguish between wants and needs. This is our overtime pay for serving Jesus. Our culture is very *want-oriented*. Let's face it; most products that we see advertized are more our wants than our needs. We're shown all the wonderful things that can happen to us, how we'll be the center of attention or have endless fun if we own whatever it is they're advertizing, and our egos say, "I want that!" If it's on sale for a limited time, we rush out and buy it, and all those things that we wanted do nothing but divert us, they draw our attention away from the suffering that others experience, they guard us from feeling true compassion for those who can't even secure what they need let alone what they want. But when we connect with those who have real needs, we gain a clearer picture of our own needs. We had no internet access in Furcy. We had no cable television, no cell phone signal. Did we need it? Not at all, and neither did any of people who lived there. No one in the community we served in Haiti had a car. None had a hand-held game console. None had ever been to Orlando; some had never left the mountain on which they dwelled. They didn't have many of the things that we find so entertaining and enjoyable, but they did have something that many of us don't have;

they had a community. They cared deeply for one another and they knew how to truly welcome strangers. If there was an illness that took the lives of a child's parents, someone in the community offered to take care of the child. If they saw that you had a *need*, they took care of that need. Many people in the village invited us into their houses, which were simple shacks smaller and simpler than many of our tool sheds, but they just wanted to address our need to feel welcomed. As we were walking the steep slopes of these mountains going from one family's shack to the next, young children would walk with us, prompting us to hold their hand we walked. We thought this was simply a kind gesture, but we soon learned that they were trying to help us, because we were not as adept as they were at walking along these steep dirt paths and there were several occasions when a small child prevented a big grown up from literally biting the dust. The community recognized our needs and did their best with the limited resources they had, to fill those needs. And living in a place where we were deprived of so many of the convenient things that we want helped us appreciate the things that we truly need. I came back with a sense that spiritually the people of Furcy were far richer than most of us in terms of the things that really matter in life. I think they had a greater sense of compassion than many of us. Though they did not have an abundance of *things*, they were living what Jesus calls an abundant life.

Which brings me to the note card. You might have been puzzled by the second question: What is something that you may need to give up in order to gain something you truly need. There are so many THINGS that we have that interfere with our spiritual growth; maybe we have to get rid of some of them. So I want you to think about what's missing in your life, something that is a real need, and what might you have to change, or eliminate in order to gain it. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be given to you as well." Seek God, and seek to serve God, and seek to love like God and all your needs will be taken care of.

Once you have identified those needs, and the change you might need to undergo to satisfy those needs, ask yourself, "How can the church help you satisfy those needs?" We're all in the same boat as far as our desire to seek the kingdom of God. We need to help one another in that search. So what can the church provide you to help you in that pursuit? You may identify yourself if you want; it might help me in addressing your need directly, whether it be helping you give up something that prevents you from gaining what you need, or something that addresses your need specifically. Chances are someone else needs the very same thing that you need, and chances are the church has the resources to address the need; that's what we try to do.

I pray that you would get acquainted with your own needs, and address them. It better equips you, as a disciple of Jesus, when it comes to identifying and addressing the needs of others.