Jesus, Our Good Shepherd

April 14, 2013

Mark 6:30-44

Key Verse 6:34 “When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.”

In this passage Jesus reveals his divine compassion on mankind and performs an amazing miracle. Jesus fed five thousand people with five loaves and two fish. Jesus reveals the image of a good shepherd for all mankind. We also learn Jesus’ desire to train his disciples to have compassionate shepherd heart for others. We live in “Generation Me.” People are narcissistic. People are selfish. They think of themselves only. Some people call them the “I, my, me” generation. They have no idea about their wives or children. They do as their egos direct them. In this atmosphere, having compassion for others is not natural. It is easy to be selfish. We need to be trained to have compassion. Lastly Jesus teaches us what to do in a challenging situation. Even if we have compassion for others and want to do something for others, we reach our limitation and despair. But Jesus said, “Go and see.” Jesus helps us to start with specific and doable thing, such as “Go and see,” and find out what we can offer to Jesus. When we offer our five loaves and two fish, Jesus can multiply and feed his sheep.

Look at verse 30. “The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught.” It was a glorious report session. The apostles had been ordinary men. They lived mundane lives as fishermen. Nothing exciting happened in their lives. They despaired over hardships and were often fearful. However, during their fieldwork training they had experienced the power of God. Their lives were changed forever. In the past, Peter’s big mouth was like a noisy gong that disturbed everyone, while accomplishing little. But now, when he opened his mouth, demons fled before him, many people repented; people were saved. Peter tasted the hope of Jesus for him to be a godly leader. As Peter testified to God’s work through him, he looked most impressive and truly great. Then John spoke up. He told how he had met a man suffering with a wasting disease. Then as John anointed him with oil and prayed, the sickness was completely healed. The man thanked John and followed him wherever he went. In fact, John finished his report by introducing the man, and everyone said “Wow.” In the past Bartholomew was a chronic underachiever, a little like Bart Simpson. Now he told how he had laid his hands on the sick and they were healed. The usually quiet Bart extended his hands before the others and said, “Through these hands, the sick were healed! Glory to God!” Especially at Bart’s report, all the disciples were amazed and they said, “Amen,” in unison.

During this report session so many people were coming and going. They had been healed and delivered by Jesus and his disciples. They wanted to hang around their shepherds. The apostles had become a source of blessing. They found meaning and joy. For the first time, they forgot about eating. In a word, their spirits were soaring. Jesus said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest” (31). The disciples needed rest. Jesus knew that when their emotions calmed down, they would be completely exhausted. They needed some physical rest and something to eat. Even more, they needed spiritual recharging that comes from quiet time with Jesus. Here we learn the rhythm of the Christian life, namely, serving men in the market place and quiet time with God. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said in his book, “Life Together,” “Many people seek fellowship because they are afraid to be alone. Let him who cannot be alone beware of community.”

But their plan to have a quiet time was disturbed. Verse 33 says, “But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.” The disciples were not happy to see them because they disturbed their retreat plan. However, Jesus’ reaction was quite different. Look at verse 34. “When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began to teach them many things.” Jesus did not look at them as buzzing flies which bother people. Jesus did not regard them as rushing monkeys who are only interested in bananas. Jesus saw them as sheep without a shepherd. They say that sheep are the most stupid animals on the face of the earth. They are dumb and they are dirty. They are defenseless and helpless. They do not have any claws or fangs to protect themselves. They are also timid and fearful. If one sheep runs away because of one strange noise, other sheep run away also before finding out what it is. They are also very stubborn. They stubbornly follow the same grazing path until they eat even the roots and destroy the field. Like sheep, people are stubborn; some of us are near-sighted; we can’t see things beyond our noses; we are feeble creatures – and sometimes our only defense is to try to run away from our problems. Dealing with sheep can be very tiring and frustrating.

But Jesus saw them with compassion. What is compassion? It is a combination of “com” and “passion.” It means “to suffer together with.” Jesus saw people’s agonies and their pain and sorrow. Compassion is seeing people with God’s eyes. When a butcher looks at sheep, he sees lamb chop. When a garment manufacturer looks at sheep, he sees wool. When a wolf looks at sheep, he sees dinner. When a shepherd looks at sheep, he sees sheep, who need guidance. Jesus is our good shepherd who sees us made in the image of God. When we see people who are lost due to their sins, it is easy to blame them, saying, “It is their fault. They deserve to suffer.” But Jesus had compassion on them. Jesus did not condemn them or blame them, but suffer together with them.

What did Jesus do when he saw them? Jesus did not provide bread or drinks. Jesus did not say any word of sympathy. Verse 34b says, “So he began teaching them many things.” This is amazing. These days people are more concerned about form rather than substance. In other words, people depend on feeling, appearances and impression rather than content and truth. Many people watch TV show such as “Touched by an angel.” They are moved by the miracles and comforted, but never think about God’s truth and check the fact against the Bible. So Jesus’ teaching people the truth of God gives us an example to follow. God speaks to the Christians living in these end times. 2 Timothy 4:3-5 says, “For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your heart in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.” May God help us to have enough compassion for people to teach the solid truth of God.

Jesus taught the crowd of people all day long. As the days go by, the disciples were growing restless. They wanted the crowds to leave so that they can eat something and take rest. Whenever the guests come, my son asks bluntly, “When are they going to leave?” As long as guests are there, he is not free. Actually, if the guests linger too long, I feel uneasy also. Finally the disciples felt they had to go and interrupt Jesus. They approached him all together and said, “Teacher, this is a remote place, and it’s already very late. Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat” (35,36). But Jesus said something shocking. Look at verse 37. “But he answered, ‘You give them something to eat.’” Jesus refused their request. Jesus’ basic attitude is to welcome God’s sheep anytime, anywhere. Jesus did not send people away. To Jesus, the time to help them was always now. Jesus wanted his disciples to have this attitude. This time, the disciples were stunned. We would have been, too.

Here Jesus is teaching his disciples to have a sense of responsibility for the crowd. To Jesus the real problem was that no one had a sense of responsibility for the people. The religious leaders should have been their shepherds. But they only made use of people for their benefit (Mk 3:2). The political leaders, such as Herod, were slaves of sin, and instruments of the devil. Compared to them, Jesus’ disciples did well to identify the need of the people. However, Jesus wanted them to do more. Jesus wanted them to take responsibility for the crowd. Many people analyze problems without doing anything. Jesus wanted his disciples to take responsibility. Furthermore, Jesus wanted them to learn faith in God Almighty. The disciples had just experienced the power of God in their lives. But when they confronted the hungry crowd of people, they again fell into human calculation and suggested a human solution. Jesus wanted them to change this pattern. As they had begun to live by faith, Jesus wanted them to continue in faith. Jesus wanted them to feed the crowd by faith.

The disciples felt overwhelmed with Jesus’ command. So they responded to him by saying, “That would take eight months of a man’s wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?” They tried to show that why it was not possible to feed them. It would take too much money, which they did not have. In fact, they said, “No way! There is nothing we can do.” Jesus did not argue with them. Jesus must have been inspired by Elisha’s story in 2 Kings 4:42-44 about feeding of 100 with 20 loaves of bread. Jesus asked, “How many loaves do you have? Go and see.” Jesus guided them with a helpful suggestion. Jesus’ challenge was huge, but his follow-up instruction was very specific and doable. When they began to obey Jesus practically, their attitudes began to change. They became positive. They found some loaves, and they also found some fish. Jesus had not asked for fish. The disciples were going beyond the letter of the command to obey it from their hearts. Now they were fully cooperating with Jesus. This was a turning point in this event. Jesus’ faith to train his disciples was changing them little by little.

Here we learn a very precious lesson. Jesus challenges us to feed his sheep. More specifically, we are praying that God may restore Canada to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, and we are praying for 65,000 University of Toronto students. How can we feed them? It seems an impossible challenge. First we need a shepherd’s heart to accept this challenge. But we need to start with specific and doable thing, such as “Go and see.” We are praying for the international summer Bible conference. We pray to bring our Bible students to learn the love of God. But it is not an easy task to bring our Bible students due to many difficulties, both financial and spiritual. It is very easy to wave our hands and say, “There is nothing we can do.” Here we learn that we must listen to Jesus’ command, “Go and see.” “Go and see” should be our life philosophy. “Go and see” should be our life of faith. When they obeyed Jesus’ command, “Go and see,” they fed five thousand people.

After the disciples were connected to Jesus through their faith and had a positive attitude, Jesus directed them to have the people sit down in groups on the green grass. Among gospel writers, only Mark describes the “green” grass. It reminds us of Psalm 23, in which the good shepherd makes his sheep lie down in green pastures. It illustrates that the crowd was safe and secure in the care of our good shepherd. To return to our shepherd Jesus solves all of our problems. How wonderful it is to lie down in green pastures and eat all we want without worrying about anything! It is the picture of the kingdom of God. In this world, there are so many dangers and unknowns. So many people live in fear and uncertainty. Many worry about their careers and direction in life. But in Jesus our good shepherd, we can lie down in green pastures in peace.

Jesus took the five loaves and two fish and, looking up to heaven, he thanked God and prayed that God would feed his children. Then God blessed him, and enough bread and fish came out of the five loaves and two fish to feed five thousand people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. God’s blessing overflowed. Verse 43 says, “…and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish.”

May God bless you to be trained to have God’s compassion for others so that you can grow as a good shepherd like Jesus. May God bless you to have “go and see” attitude so that God may bless your five loaves and two fish when you offer them to Jesus.