

Sermon for the 9th Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 6:30-44, Psalm 23

Jesus, the Good Shepherd Turns Desert Places Into Green Pastures!

When the phrase deserted place, what comes to mind?

Isolation, loneliness, Emptiness, Struggle, dryness, and desolation. Those phrases came to my mind. Three times in our gospel for the day the Mark describes Jesus and the disciples going to or in a desert place. If you have ever found yourself experiencing desert place symptoms, consider that you just might be there because Jesus has brought there! Why? To take care of you, to turn your attention to God's love, care, supply for your life! Our Lord does amazing work in these places.

After the disciples return from their successful missionary work, Jesus leads these disciples to a desert place. Off they go, not to celebrate success with a feast, or off to a resort with all the comforts of luxury. Jesus takes them to the deserted place to them rest. It is here where Jesus does amazing work.

Upon arriving at this deserted place, it turns out that the places are not all that deserted after all. Jesus saw the crowds. They had followed Jesus and His disciples to this deserted place. "Jesus seeing them has compassion on them for they were like sheep without a shepherd." Jesus seeing them had compassion on them. That means He could feel in His gut all their pain, all their disappointments, all their spiritual dryness. Jesus could feel that their lives resembled living in a desert. They were lost, they were spiritual hungry.

What does Jesus do? I confess I would have told them to go away. This is my day off. Not Jesus. His compassion is too strong for that cold of a response. Jesus teaches them. He gives them God's Word. He talks about God's love and His care for them. That they are His children. Jesus may have told them about the great and awesome work when their ancestors wandered in the wilderness or desert or desolate place for 40 years. How The LORD them with bread from Heaven and quail at evening. How water came from the rock. God does great work in desert places.

This goes on as late afternoon falls upon them. The disciples now worry that this crowd of people are going to starve with food to eat. "This a desert place," the disciples remind Jesus where they are. "Send them away so that they can buy food for themselves." Jesus has other ideas. Seeing the disciples Jesus gives them a ministry. "You give them something to eat." But half a year wages would not buy enough to give them a little bit. Oh, these disciples of little faith! Remember two Sundays ago we heard how Jesus sent these same disciples out on that missionary journey from which they had just returned from report great success. Remember how Jesus sent them with nothing but a walking stick in hand, and just the clothes and sandals they wore with no money in their purse? They went out and true enough along the way they were provided for. They relied on God's provision for all their needs. Now in this desert place they lose confidence in God's supply for the need at hand in an overwhelming situation.

"How many loaves do you have?" Jesus asks. After searching the crowd, they find 5 loaves and two fish. They give them to Jesus. Crowd is seated, in groups 100 and 50s. By the way there was a lot of green grass. Jesus takes the loaves and the fish. He looks to heaven. Said a blessing. Perhaps something like, "O Lord the eyes of all, look to you and you give them their food at the proper time. Open wide your hand and satisfy the needs of all creatures." Jesus breaks the bread and hands the bread to the disciples

who distribute the bread to the crowd. Jesus did the same with the fish. They all ate and were satisfied. Jesus had cared for them like no one else. Jesus turned that desert place into nourishing green pastures.

And so, it for us. How often do we find ourselves in a desert place? A struggle, a sense that God has deserted me. The truth is that sin has separated us from God's love. It has put up that dividing wall that separates us from God. That is the worst desert place. But if you find yourself there, In the middle of a world of change and desolation. There is one thing that never changes. It is the Cross of Christ. The cross shows us the desolation of our sins. But the cross shows us the love of God. The cross shows us how God so loved you and me that He sent one and only begotten Son who went freely to that desolate place for us. There He wins forgiveness of sins, tears down the dividing wall that separates us from God and each other through the gift of forgiveness. Jesus turns the desolation of the cross into green pastures for you and me. Jesus' death was not final. He rose from the dead and we who believe have the sure and certain hope of eternal life. He gives us His Holy Spirit and His life. A relationship of faith and trust in His promises for you.

This could be a good place to say amen. But there is more. After all, eat and were satisfied, that is, 5,000 ate on 5 loaves and two fish. There were leftovers. 12 baskets full of leftovers.

It just this shows us the great work our Lord does in desert places. There was abundance of overflowing bread at the end.