



## Eighth Sunday after Pentecost July 18, 2021

*"I shall not want"*

Pastor Kirk Kerns

*"They were like sheep without a shepherd"  
(Mark 6:34b)*

Let us pray: Lord Jesus Christ, our good shepherd, you give us new birth in the waters of baptism, you anoint us with oil, and you nourish us at your table with heavenly food. In your goodness and mercy, dispel the shadows of evil and death, and lead us along safe paths, that we may rest securely in you and dwell in the house of the Lord now and forever, for your name's sake. Amen.

A lot happens in the sixth chapter of Mark. Jesus is rejected by his hometown, he sends the disciples out two by two to the surrounding communities to minister to them and to proclaim the Kingdom of God is coming near. Then we have that break in the story where last week we read about the death of John the Baptist. This week's gospel has the apostles returning and telling Jesus all that they had done and he offers them to take some leave and

have some rest. The next piece of the sixth chapter of Mark is not part of the lectionary and it is the feeding of the five thousand but we will read that story from the gospel of John next week. Finally today our gospel reports Jesus and the apostles crossed over the sea again to Gennesaret where they found people looking to Jesus for healing.

At the center of today's readings is the image of the shepherd caring for the sheep. In some instances, the sheep are said to be lost and that does not mean physically lost but they are separated from God. In other instances, we have the Good Shepherd who has compassion for the sheep, "Because they were like sheep without a shepherd." Jeremiah points to the "shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of God's pasture." We have such a mixed bag in the shepherding of the people today that ultimately points to the one shepherd who is the Lord and we shall not want.

The reality is that if we believe that God is with us in the dark valleys and the green pastures then the logical response would be that we shall not want. But that seems to be counter cultural in our society as everyone wants something. Our whole lives at times are based on something we want. Some of those wants are legitimate but if we really think about it we just want something that we think would make our lives easier. We all want new stuff at times and our

consumer culture directs us to those wants. In my last call, I taught confirmation mainly because I didn't have anyone to do so. At one point, we would talk about wants and needs when we pray. I have said that before here in a sermon that what we need is important such as food and clothing and caring for family. What we want may be a new bike and if you are praying to God for a new bike you may be surprised. Instead you should go to grandma or grandpa and ask for that new bike.

Psalm 23 is a familiar passage and it appears in the lectionary several times. But there is a contrast from the psalm and the gospel where Jesus says that the people were like sheep without a shepherd. The psalm says "The Lord is my shepherd." If the Lord is the shepherd, then we are sheep, and the reason sheep need a shepherd is simple: sheep nibble themselves lost. Leave a sheep without a shepherd and they will wander around nibbling grass until they find themselves in a place they should not be and may fall victim to a predator. We may not want to admit it but we are like sheep at times. We wander away from the shepherd who has compassion for his sheep.

We don't lack lots of things but at times we lack one thing. The one thing we lack is intimacy with God. The one and only thing that can cause us to say, "I shall not want," or "I lack no good thing," is God and nothing else. It is Just the

Lord who is a good shepherd to his sheep. The realization that we are in need of the shepherd can happen when we least expect it to happen.

I read a story this week where a pastor was feeling down and out and went into a local pharmacy to pick up a prescription. She was met at the cash register by a new face. The employee was new and she looked a little rattled and the pastor greeted her and asked how she was doing. The employee said she was fine and out of nowhere stated how hard things were right now and told the pastor to keep on praying that was the only way to make things easier. They didn't know each other but just that little encouragement helped the pastor who was a little down. The shepherd can show up in many places reminding us that when we feel lost there is somewhere to turn.

The gospel passage has great crowds gathering around Jesus looking for him to heal the sick and to just be present with him. Jesus invited the apostles "to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." But the crowds show up before they can even get off of the boat and that is when Jesus goes ashore as a shepherd and teaches them many things. Jesus and his followers then get back in the boat and go across the lake again to Gennesaret and the people recognized him and "rushed about the whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was."

Jesus invites the disciples to rest; you'll notice that they don't get that opportunity. Instead, Jesus and his disciples respond to the needs of the throngs coming to them. Seeing the crowds and their manifold unmet needs, Jesus, Mark reports, has compassion on them. He puts his plans for rest temporarily on hold and goes out to them, healing, curing, feeding, and teaching all who are in need.

The gospel passage starts out seeking some rest for the disciples and Jesus among their labors and then shifts gears to move instead to talk about compassion and need. Compassion and need always go together. So I want to ask you what are your needs right now. What is it that you need to feel whole, to be happy, to lead fulfilling lives, to make a difference in the world, to feel like you belong and do you have a place to call your own. How does the shepherd lead you from the darkest valley to the green pastures? How are your needs met?

In today's gospel and others like it in Mark's gospel, the needs seem clear. The people who are sick want to be healed. The people who are hungry want something to eat. The people who are struggling in any way are seeking relief. These same needs are part of our local and national and international landscape. Sometimes these same needs are right here in this congregation. In these cases, we as a faith community can play an active role in meeting those concrete needs.

If you notice when we are asking for donations for ministries that we support, you normally have a list posted for you to consider. The Church and Community Committee doesn't make up these lists without asking what is needed. Right now you have a list of items that are needed for the health clinic at Christ Lutheran on 13<sup>th</sup> Street in the Allison Hill section of Harrisburg. They provide the list of needs and we ask that you consider helping out. That is the compassion that is needed to help meet people where they are at right now when we donate items. You all have been very generous in your giving and it is providing some things that are needed.

Our gospel passage gives us some less tangible needs in evidence as well. In fact, Jesus first responds to the crowds because they seem lost, like "sheep without a shepherd." Here he doesn't cure or feed but instead reaches out and meets them, teaching and preaching and opening up to them the power and possibility of life in God's Kingdom. So what is it that you really need and I don't mean wants. What are you willing to change in order to get that desired element into your lives? Remember I am talking about true needs and not wants. The consumer driven advertising and consumerism has a different means of telling you what you need and may want.

Right now I can probably safely say that you all want things to go back to what we see as normal. There are some of you who are looking for some relief in your life either financially, medically, mentally, or socially. We want life to be gentler and kinder. We want things to solve themselves without our efforts. All of this starts with ourselves seeking out what the shepherd would have us do and respond to the needs around us. Compassion is a big word that can challenge us but remember that Jesus even in his exhausted state came ashore and had compassion on those gathered. He was the good shepherd who had compassion for those gathered.

As I just stated, compassion and needs go hand in hand. But then the psalmist says, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want" or as one translation says, "I lack nothing." We have the Good Shepherd who shepherds us as his sheep and when we wander away we will be like a sheep that will fall prey to its surroundings. So be strong and seek the Shepherd's care and follow the Shepherd's leads in life and you will not want. Amen.

Let us pray: Gracious Lord, our Shepherd, guide us through the dark valleys of life to the green pastures that only you can provide. Guide us to show the compassion that you give us as a great example. May we always show your compassion in all that we say and do. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.