

**For July 21, 2024 at Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church**

Grace, mercy and peace are yours from God the Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

The Word of God for us to consider this morning is from:

**Mark 6:30-34 (EHV)**

*The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all that they had done and taught. <sup>31</sup>He said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while.” For there were so many people coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat. <sup>32</sup>They went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. <sup>33</sup>But many people saw them leave and knew where they were going. They ran there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. <sup>34</sup>When Jesus stepped out of the boat, he saw a large crowd. His heart went out to them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. He began to teach them many things.*

Dear friends in Christ,

God compares people to sheep often in the Bible. Sheep want to follow their shepherd. People want to follow someone. We want someone to lead us, otherwise we wander aimlessly or follow the wrong leader into serious trouble. Praise God that we have Jesus as our Good Shepherd. Sheep need a shepherd and we have the Good Shepherd who gives us rest as he teaches us.

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The apostles had just returned from a mission journey. They preached the gospel, taught the people and even performed miracles. They walked many miles. They worked very hard.

Some people believed their message, and some did not. These disciples were physically worn out. They were mentally worn out. They needed rest. Business trips can feel like that. Long weeks can too. Even vacations can be exhausting. You go away for a while but then feel like you need another vacation when you return to recover from your vacation.

The disciples needed a break from dealing with people when they returned from their mission journey. What did they find when they came back to Jesus? People...a continual crowd of people coming to ask for Jesus' help. They did not even have a chance to eat because the people kept coming. There was no break in the action.

Maybe you have had a day like that. One child needs help finding their favorite shirt in the morning. Just when you find it, another child needs something else. Then one spills the milk. The cat has been drinking up the spilled milk which means he will get sick any time now. There is laundry to do and dishes to do even though you just did them. When will you ever get a little quiet time?

The good news is that Jesus knows you need rest. He invites his disciples to come with him to get some rest. Scripture does not record the disciples complaining about how hard they've been working or how tired they are. Jesus already knew and cared and wanted to help. He is the Shepherd and leads his people to rest. *"Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while."*

What a wonderful invitation from our Savior. Get some rest. Physical, mental and especially spiritual. You are here this morning in a great place to get some rest. Hopefully, not many are getting their physical rest in the pews by sleeping. Certainly, we get some mental rest at church because it is different from our other activities. However, we come here especially for that spiritual rest. We are sheep who need the Shepherd to give us spiritual rest.

Every single person in the world needs Jesus to be their Shepherd. Every person needs the forgiveness Jesus offers and gives. The difference is that some know it, and some don't. Some believe it, and some don't. Are you aware of your sins? Do those sins trouble you? Do you know that you need to be forgiven? All we have to do is compare our life to the Ten Commandments to know the answer.

We confess that we have sinned against our Lord in many ways. But why do we always have to remind ourselves of our sin? Wouldn't it be nicer just to talk about how good and nice and amazing Jesus is? We could just talk about how he taught people to help others and love each other. There are plenty of authors and teachers out in the world who tell people how to be good. There are books and videos and websites that will tell you how to be nice and how to help people and how to live a happy life. And plenty of people follow like sheep.

However, we continually remind ourselves of our sin and our deep need for a Savior because following any other so called shepherd of the world will do nothing to forgive our sins and will do nothing to get us to heaven. Only Jesus takes away sins. Only our Good Shepherd laid down his life on the cross to forgive the sin of the world. Only Jesus is the way and the truth and the life. Following Jesus in faith is the only way to eternal life, the only way to eternal rest. If you want a pretty nice life, you have your pick of many teachings to follow. If you want rest for your soul through the forgiveness of sins, follow Jesus. We need a Shepherd and Jesus is the One to give us rest.

Jesus' plan to give the disciples some physical rest and a chance to talk about their mission journey with him was simple. Get in a boat and sail away to a solitary place, a place where there were no crowds of people asking for help. Imagine arriving at a beautiful place on the ocean with palm trees and not another soul in sight. The only thing you hear is the waves and

the wind and the wildlife. Perfect...until the cruise ship sails into the bay and drops off several thousand loud tourists who take over the area. Some of them, seeing that you were there first ask you for directions to a great restaurant or where to catch some fish or the best place to watch the sunset.

That's what the crowds did to Jesus and his disciples except they ran along the shore and arrived before Jesus. They were not about to let their Shepherd go away for some quiet time. They wanted more from him. Finally, they found someone who taught with authority, and they wanted to hear more. Jesus could have brushed them off because he was tired, because it was after hours or because it was his day off. But he didn't.

Sometimes we might brush off other people's problems because we have our own problems. Besides, we don't have time to get involved. It takes too much effort to help. That person will never be able to do anything to repay me. I deserve my money and possessions and recreation time and down time and shouldn't have to share it with anyone. Besides, there are other people in the congregation who will help.

Jesus' attitude is different.

*When Jesus stepped out of the boat, he saw a large crowd. His heart went out to them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. He began to teach them many things.*

Here was a group of people before Jesus who were being taught by the Pharisees that they had to be really good to please God. In fact, they had to keep the Commandments of God and the rules made by the Pharisees. Only then would they be accepted. Here was a group of people longing for a Savior from sin because they were being taught to save themselves by their own good actions. These were lost sheep and Jesus' heart went out to them.

May we too have compassion on those who need help, especially towards those who need to know the Savior. Jesus showed compassion on the crowd of people by teaching them many things. He still speaks to us through his Word, the Bible. Take advantage of the time you have to hear your Shepherd speak in worship, in Bible classes, and in quiet reading time at home. Have compassion on someone else by inviting them to join you in those activities and listen to Jesus.

In just over a month, Sunday School will begin again. Crowds of children will gather in the classrooms. What do they most need to learn about? Jesus. Some of you will have the great privilege of teaching some of God's children about their Savior this year. Parents, whether you have one child at home or a crowd of children, you have the privilege and responsibility from God to teach your children about their Good Shepherd. Read Bible stories to them. Pray with them. Pray for them. Don't let someone take that privilege away. The same goes for all of us, whether you are a parent or grandparent, a son or daughter, a friend or neighbor, may we teach others about Jesus. We all have the same need for a Savior from sin. Jesus is the answer to everyone's great need. Have compassion by sharing the answer in Christ.

Lots of bad things can happen to sheep who have no shepherd. They can run out of food or water. Predators can attack. The sheep may wander and get lost. That's why sheep need a shepherd. Jesus is the Shepherd we need. Follow him by listening to his voice in the Word of God and he will give you rest.

Amen.