

We just heard the gospel reading for today and there is a *striking dramatic flow to the story*. But it is even more so...when we connect it to what we heard last Sunday...and we include the verses that were omitted by the lectionary. So, here's the *larger* dramatic flow of these events from the Gospel:

- Jesus sent out his disciples for the first time on their own, two by two, to teach and heal others.
- When they returned they had much to tell Jesus. Jesus could also see that they were hungry--maybe even "hangry"--and they needed some time to retreat together. So they headed off to a deserted place to be together.
- But before they could get there they were discovered and crowds of people pressed in upon them.
- The disciples asked Jesus to send them away, but instead, what happened was the feeding of the 5000.
- Then they continued on, by boat, toward the deserted place where they could be alone together.
- There was a storm on the sea, and the disciples were terrified, but Jesus stilled the storm.
- Then they reached land, but before they could get to their deserted destination, they were once again surrounded by crowds of people who were sick and seeking healing.
- And Jesus and the disciples spent time with them.

The story never says if they finally reached their quiet place or not.

Clergy immediately identify with this narrative. The life of a priest—and any staff surrounding a priest—can often involve quick transitions from one need to the next...and often multiple needs at the same time. And it is not just the *pace* of things that characterizes that kind of flow...but it can also be the *complexity* of the needs and issues involved. And then, underneath all that, there can be the more invisible challenge of the *emotional shifts* ... when you need to make sudden shifts...like going from conferring on a *funeral*, to working on a child's *baptism*...or responding to a *hospitalization*, to helping with the joy of *wedding* plans. A lot of things can happen, one after the next, or almost simultaneously, and you have to keep moving, even when your mind or heart isn't quite ready.

But of course, you don't have to be clergy...to have your own...parallel experience. Life comes at all of us fast these days...the life we are *making* for ourselves...but also the life that *happens*...that comes "*at us*" unexpectedly...uninvited... all the time. Even in a "normal" week—whatever that is--everyone seems to be living their own version of a *hurried narrative with complex needs and issues*...regardless of our age and phase of life, our employment, or retirement.

The quiet place...the restful moments...the time to catch up with our own minds and hearts...and those close to us...when we don't feel harried---these can be all too elusive. *There is no obvious self-help solution to all this. And the Gospel story doesn't offer a fix.* Instead, it displays the *flow that we know*...that even Jesus and his disciples...were not free from.

But there is also something present in their story...*that made a difference...in their hurried experience.* Although, I don't believe the disciples were able to recognize it at the time. |

A writer once said...that one of *the* most miraculous statements in the whole Bible is...Mark 6:34:

“And as Jesus went ashore, he saw a *great crowd*; and he had *compassion* for them...”

And I remember that writer going on to make the wry remark...that whenever *he* is pressed in upon by a *great crowd*...that the *last thing* that occurs to him is...compassion! But instead, it is more likely to be like the disciples: frustration...annoyance...weariness.

It really is remarkable that Jesus' response to the crowds was compassion—especially when they were trying to get away and find some peace and quiet to be together.

Jesus' response helps me to remember that getting caught in a fast narrative...with lots of needs and issues... is actually harder if I only think of myself...even when what I need is right and good. Jesus was able to make the shift to *empathizing* with the need of the others coming to them.

Which is exactly what *compassion* is all about—it is not some kind of felt obligation to be *nice*. The word “compassion” itself literally means a voluntary “suffering with” someone. In other words, compassion is the potential to step outside ourselves...and feel for someone else...to have an open-heartedness... toward someone else's distress.

Compassion is a quiet and invisible miracle...of when two sufferings willingly touch. And what can happen then is that a burden becomes a little lighter...for both. There can even be more energy that arrives to meet the moment. And we are less inclined to get trapped...in our resistance...our frustration or annoyance...at the many needs that can sometimes come at us fast.

Jesus and the disciples were pressed in upon by a crowd with lots of needs. The disciples were frustrated...but Jesus had compassion. And the miracle of compassion kept Jesus going. |

We cannot necessarily “fix” our lives...much less the lives of others. But may God grant us the grace of an open heart...so that we may do what we can...and not be overwhelmed by all that we cannot do...trusting in the even greater compassion...of God.

‘Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.’ (Matthew 11:28-30)