

³⁰ The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. ³¹ Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”

³² So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. ³³ But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. 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.

Jesus is a Compassionate Shepherd

1. He gives rest to weary sheep
2. He rescues lost sheep

In John chapter 10, Jesus calls himself the “Good Shepherd.” Most of you don’t know any shepherds. Most of you have never had to work with sheep. But the people Jesus was talking to could relate to the picture. They knew how helpless sheep are on their own. They can’t find their own food and water. They don’t have any fangs or claws to protect themselves. If they get lost, they can’t find their way back.

So they knew how important it is for sheep to have a shepherd – and not just any shepherd, but a good shepherd, a shepherd who cares about them and takes care of them.

Spiritually speaking, you know how much we sheep need a Good Shepherd. We’re helpless when it comes to anything spiritual, aren’t we? We’re born lost, and we can’t find our way to God on our own. We can’t provide for ourselves or protect ourselves spiritually.

Thank God he’s given us a Good Shepherd – a compassionate Shepherd, Jesus. In the gospel lesson this morning, that’s what we see. We see Jesus’ compassion for sheep: How he gives rest to weary sheep, and how he rescues lost sheep.

1. He gives rest to weary sheep

You can think of the three or so years that Jesus spent with his disciples on earth kind of like their “seminary education.” He called them to be fishers of men, and during that time he was preparing them for that task.

So, in the gospel lesson this morning, the disciples had just gotten back from their “vicar year.” Jesus had sent them out two by two, and this was their first taste of ministry. They were preaching their first sermons, making their first evangelism calls, healing sick people, driving out demons.

You can imagine that, after a journey like that, they’d come back a little worn out. But when they got to Jesus, they found people flocking to him like people today flock to a sports hero or a movie star. They were curious. They wanted to see more miracles. Mark says **so many people were coming and going that they didn’t even have a chance to eat.**

The situation was hectic, stressful, tiring. You can picture the relief on the disciples’ faces, then, when Jesus turned to them and said: “**Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.**”

Jesus had compassion on these tired sheep of his. He could sympathize with them; he got tired, he needed rest. But Jesus had more to offer them than just a few minutes of relaxation. As the compassionate Shepherd of their souls, he wanted to give them something better: Spiritual rest.

That was something these disciples needed, too. I’m sure they came back from this trip with a lot on their minds. Mark tells us they **reported to him all they had done and taught.** What do you think they said? I bet they had exciting reports of demons coming out, people believing their message. But they reported *all* they had done. Do you think some of their

mistakes and failures came out in that conversation, too? Some sins they had committed on the way – things that were weighing on their consciences?

And they must have carried back with them a good share of worry and concern. Not everyone accepted their message. Some probably opposed them. In fact, John the Baptist had just been beheaded. They preached repentance, just like he did. What would happen to them?

More than physical rest, they needed rest for their souls, and they'd find that in their quiet time with Jesus. He'd lead them to the green pastures and quiet waters of God's Word. He had words just for them, words of forgiveness to give them peace, words of promise to give them comfort.

Jesus wants you to have that same rest. When you heard the hectic, stressful situation the disciples found themselves in, did you find yourself thinking, "Sounds a lot like my life sometimes?" Work runs late. Dishes need to be washed. Kids need to be fed. The phone doesn't seem to stop ringing. You need rest.

But, in all that, don't forget that your soul needs rest. Isn't that the lesson Jesus is teaching you here? No matter how busy life gets, don't forget to spend some quiet time with him in his Word and find rest for your souls.

Your Shepherd knows that you need it. Busy schedules are a breeding ground for temptations to worry, fear, doubt. Those things weigh heavy on you. And, every day, busy or not, there's something that weighs you down even more: The burden of sin. Just like the disciples, you're accountable to Jesus for how you live. The standard is perfection, and you never match up. The bible says, "We all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way..." That describes every day of our lives pretty well. We wander off after our own sinful desires. We pile up sin after sin – thoughts, words, and actions. The guilt of those sins weighs on our consciences.

But you have a compassionate Shepherd. He still says to you, "**Come with me by yourself to a quiet place and get some rest.**" Spend a few minutes with Jesus in the Word. He wants you to rest. Your burden of sin and guilt? In his Word, he shows you how he already bore that burden for you on the cross. "The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." All your sins were placed on Jesus, and when he died, they disappeared forever. You are at peace – at rest – with God.

What about your worries and fears? In his Word, he gently leads you back to his sure promises to you. A few minutes ago, you sang Psalm 23. What did David tell you about your Shepherd there? He'll always provide for you, body and soul: "The Lord's my Shepherd; I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, leads me besides quiet waters..." He'll always protect you: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me." His love for you will never fail: "Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life..." And he'll bring you to heaven when you die: "...and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Rest – in God's forgiveness, and in God's promises. That's what your Shepherd gives you when you spend time with him in his Word.

II. He rescues lost sheep

And that's what Jesus gave to his disciples – at least while they were in the boat. Mark tells us, ³² **So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.** The plan was simple: Push off, leave the crowd on shore, and land somewhere quiet. But it didn't work out that way. ³³ **But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.**

Put yourself into Jesus' shoes for a second. How would you react? Let's say your boss calls on your day off, and tells you he needs you at work ASAP. Would you be annoyed? Angry? Disappointed?

Not Jesus. ³⁴ **When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.**

What happens to sheep without a shepherd? In the news last week, I saw that a sheep in England wandered away from the rest of the flock, right out onto a cliff face. It couldn't go up. It couldn't go down. It was stuck. The cliff was 200 feet high, so no one could rescue it. All they could do was put it out of its misery.

Sheep without a shepherd are bound to die. Lost souls without Jesus are bound to die eternally in hell for their sins. That's what Jesus saw when he looked at these crowds coming to meet him...and he loved them. This is why he had come: To seek and save lost sinners. **So he began teaching them many things** – most importantly, how he was their true Shepherd from all eternity who would lay down his life for them.

What a lesson for the disciples! In just a few years, God would be using them to lead lost sheep to Jesus. They could remember that day, the look on Jesus' face when he saw that crowd – not anger, not annoyance, not disappointment, but compassion – and imitate that in their ministries.

And what a lesson for you and for me! God wants us to have this same compassion for lost sinners, because he uses us to lead them to Jesus. If you're honest with yourself, is that what you always find in your heart – this same compassion for the lost that Jesus has? We all say with God, "I want all men to be saved." But don't you sometimes struggle with feelings of indifference? "His beliefs are none of my business." "I'll just live my life and let them live theirs..."

How do you get past that? How does Jesus give you his compassion for the lost? He does it by reminding you of what he's done for you. You were that sheep on the cliff face. Your situation was hopeless; you were lost in sin, and hell was all you could look forward to. There was no reason for him to love you, but he did. Before the beginning of time he loved you and chose you to be his sheep. Then came that greatest act of love the world has ever known – your Shepherd laid down his life for your sins, only to take it up again as proof of your forgiveness. Finally, he gave you his Holy Spirit and brought you to faith and made you know him as your Savior.

Towards the end of Jesus' Good Shepherd speech in John 10, he says this: "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd." Jesus still has sheep out there who don't know him yet, who are waiting to hear their Shepherd's voice. May God give us a compassionate heart to reach out to them with God's Word and lead them into their Savior's arms. Amen.