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Lord's Day Morning
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“Loving Your Neighbor”

Mark 6:33-44

Introduction

If you were not with us last week, today is the second week in a series this month we are calling *Sharpening Our Vision*. Our goal for the month is to highlight the things that make this congregation who we are. What is our reason for existing? Why has God raised us up? As we continue to grow in numbers, we are aware of how important it is that we keep our vision sharp and our purposes focused. And so over these four weeks, we are trying to emphasize in the preaching, those Scriptural truths and commands that shape us. And in the afternoons, we are supplementing the preaching with some very practical hands on seminars that naturally flow from our vision.

Last week we began with the big picture. Our highest calling and grandest purpose is to glorify God. Everything else flows from this central purpose. At the heart of it, the thing that provides the fuel for any mission that we have is worship. No matter how many programs and plans and activities we generate, they will all produce barren wastelands if they are not motivated and fed by a longing to worship God and exalt His name. If that is our lifeblood, then from it will come a great desire for the whole world to join into bringing Him glory – and mission is born. We want to affirm with Habakkuk, our desire that the glory of God would cover the earth as the water covers the sea.

Today, then, we turn our attention to *Christ's Church and her Community*. How do we view and

relate to the part of the world where God has placed us? If we are engaged in the worship of God and learning to live for His glory, what kind of heart will begin to beat within us?

If our heart becomes like God's heart, then without a doubt we will begin to develop a love for people. Our hearts will begin to beat with compassion for our neighbor. The greatest commandment is to *love the Lord with all your heart*. The second is like it. *You shall love your neighbor as yourself*.

[Mark 6:33-44]

Let me ask you a question. Imagine you were a Christian born and raised in a strong Christian family and church from another country. As you grew into adulthood, you felt a strong call to be a missionary. Let say your church, after praying and fasting, set you apart for missionary work and assigned you to move to the USA and live in Lafayette, Indiana. Here's the question: *If you were a missionary, how would your attitudes and actions be different than they are now?* The truth is, if you are a Christian, you are a missionary. You are an ambassador for Christ. The problem is we often have trouble viewing ourselves that way.

When I have visited missionaries overseas, there is almost always a different attitude that is present in the missionary community. Good missionaries are conscious of their mission. Everything they do, every decision they make, every action they commit to is influenced by their desire to impact the people around them with the gospel. Do you think that way?

Another question we can ask can be addressed to the whole congregation. *Does the*

community exist for the church or do we exist for the community? In other words, do we view this place around us as a place where we can get new members and grow into a bigger church, where we can have our objectives met and our goals and desires realized? Or do we think about how God has placed us here to serve and love the community with the gospel?

The thing that makes the difference in both questions is love and compassion. If the community and cities here exist simply to serve us and to make our lives better or more enjoyable – or our church more prominent, then we are motivated by a love for ourselves. If, on the other hand we view ourselves as being here, both individually and as a church, for the sake of the community and her people, then we are driven by love.

This morning I want to review some things on compassion and love that we have looked at in the past; things that have really shaped the heart of this church. And my hope is that we will renew our prayer that God would give us hearts filled with the love and compassion of Christ.

Verse 34 is a verse worth modeling our lives around. It reveals to us the heart of Christ. "*When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things.* Let's notice three things about compassion.

1. Compassion involves a desire to love.

The word *splagchnon* sounds like what it means. It means your guts, your bowels, your inner parts. Acts 1:18 uses it exactly like that. *Judas burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out.* More typically however, it means the inner seat of emotions or affections. Philippians 1:8 says *God*

is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. Or John 3:17, whoever beholds his bother in need and closes his heart, how does the love of God abide in him?

Compassion is not merely an intellectual condition. Compassion involves tenderness and concern. It stimulates the emotions. It implies an understanding of the need but goes beyond that to personal concern. That's why when we see this word compassion being used in reference to Jesus, it nearly always says, *He felt compassion* or *He was moved with compassion*. Compassion is more than a duty. It is a desire.

2. Compassion involves an ability to see. In 50% of the uses of this word, it is directly connected with the word **see**. In the other 50% it is implied. So you see here in verse 34. *He **saw** a great multitude and He felt compassion.*

What did He see when He looked at the multitude. Matthew 9:36 tells us that He saw that they were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd. When Jesus sees people, He sees their heart, He sees their need.

What do you see when you look at people? One of the things we ought to be praying is that God would give us eyes to see like Jesus sees and hearts to feel like He feels. We need to train ourselves to look for and perceive the needs of others. How else can we help? How else can we really serve? How else can we show them compassion?

3. Compassion involves a Willingness to Act. In every instance in the New Testament where this word compassion is used, it is followed by action. When Jesus was moved with compassion He always did something about it. He took action based on the need. Sometimes He would teach; sometimes He

would feed; sometimes heal or welcome or serve or forgive or cleanse or pray. Whatever was needed, He would do it.

Real compassion involves action. If there is no action, we can question whether there is real compassion and love.

Now with that review and background, let's see how it is worked out in the feeding of the five thousand. What does love and compassion look like? Notice several things:

1. Personal Involvement

After teaching the multitudes all day long, the disciples begin to perceive a problem. It's late, the people are hungry and there is very little food around. Their solution is simple – *send them away and let them fend for themselves*. You'll notice that they met two of the three criteria for compassion. They saw the need and they had an action plan. All they lacked was the desire to love this crowd.

Jesus' solution was different. He very pointedly said, *You give them something to eat*. So the first step, and one we keep trying to promote in this congregation, is "get involved." Come to life with the view that God wants to use you to help people. Ask God for a heart like His that is moved by the needs of people. Ask Him to help you see people in ways you've never seen them before.

2. Christ uses available gifts and resources.

Jesus next question was, *how many loaves do you have? What's available?* It very significant that Jesus chooses to multiply what is on hand rather than creating something new. (Remember the old TV show *The A Team*?) So often, when there is a need to be met, we tend to stand around and make excuses for why we can't do it. We say things like *I'm not talented enough. I've never done it before. It's not my gift. There's not enough of this or that.*

When it comes to ministering to people and showing compassion, we need to realize that Jesus doesn't need someone else. He can use you, just the way you are. He can multiply your gifts. He can bless your feeble efforts. He longs to use you for His glory. Jesus only had five loaves and two fishes. But it was enough in His hands to feed thousands.

3. Faith

The disciples stood before the creator of the world and saw no solution but to go and spend a half a year's wages on bread. Jesus looked up toward heaven. In that simple act He taught a profound lesson. When God uses us to meet the needs of others, we must point them to heaven. Never can we take credit for what God has done. Never can we allow people to rely on us.

A ministry of compassion leads others to Jesus Christ. Today's version of *compassionate conservatism* usually focuses on the physical to the exclusion of the spiritual. As missionaries, one of our great callings and privileges is to teach others to look to Christ to have their needs met.

4. Involvement of the Body of Christ.

One of the beauties of ministry which finds its center in the church is the resources of the whole church are available. We don't have to and shouldn't see ministry in terms of just me. Having compassion doesn't mean we have to do it all or have all the gifts, answers and resources.

Jesus could have done it all. He had all the necessary resources to feed the multitudes. But He took the bread and the fish and gave it to his disciples. He included others in the blessing of ministry. And that's exactly what He still does today. The fact that He allows us to be involved with Him in the work of redemption is one of our greatest privileges on earth.

5. Meeting of real needs.

When all was said and done, verse 42 gives a wonderful perspective to what we are aiming for. *They all ate and were satisfied.* Jesus gave them two things that day. He gave them food for their bodies and He gave them food for their souls.

As you consider becoming someone who loves His neighbor, ask yourself the question, *what is their real need? What will it take for them to be truly satisfied?* It may start with food or clothing. They might need a friend or a listening ear. It could be counseling or encouragement or understanding. But ultimately all of our needs will only be met and satisfied in Jesus Christ.

This is our vision. *To see and meet the needs of people with the love of Christ.* It may take many different forms and work itself out through a hundred different avenues. But if we are going to be the kind of church and the kind of people God wants us to be, we must strive to love people and bring them to Jesus. This is at the heart of the jail ministry. If we ever start seeing people from the jail ministry as a problem, we have lost our focus. This is at the heart of the Purdue ministry. If we ever view students as a drain on the time, emotion and energy of the congregation, we have lost our vision and love. This is what should stir every ministry we see developed.

Are you a missionary to Lafayette? Could you begin to see yourself as that kind of an ambassador for Christ? You can if God gives you a heart of compassion and a love for the lost. Will you ask Him for that?