

Share the healing love of Jesus

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Pentecost + 8B – Mark 6 30-34 & 53-56

Do you think much about picture framing? I'm always impressed by people who know about colours and visual association. They see things I don't. And when they show me how the associations work, it can really change the things I see.

The Gospel of Mark does this too, but in stories. Often in this gospel, one story gets put inside another. The first story stops while another story or two get told, then the first story picks up from where it left off. So the feelings, colours and impressions you build up as you read one story carry over into the next one. And just in case you've forgotten those impressions and feelings by the time you've got deeper into the other story, you pick them up again afterwards, because the gospel takes you straight back into the first story. So when you think of the middle story, your idea of it is touched and coloured by the story that surrounds it; by its frame.

The Gospel story we heard last week – that horrible one about Herod having John the Baptist killed – was framed by the story of Jesus sending out the twelve, and their return today. By putting that terrible story of the end of a ministry in the middle of a story about new ministries beginning, Mark is saying that bad things may happen in the midst of kindness and hope, but that kindness and the hope continue on anyway. So Mark uses the mission of the twelve as a frame to help us see that it's the good news that sets the agenda; not the terrible event.

Today, we're given a frame without its picture. First, we

gather around Jesus as the disciples report back on their mission. Jesus invites us to sail away to a quiet place with him; somewhere we can rest and eat. But nobody lets us get away with that. People guess where Jesus and his disciples are going, and by the time they land, there's a large crowd waiting for them. Jesus has compassion on that crowd. So that's the top of the frame. Then we jump about twenty verses and find Jesus and his disciples again quietly mooring the boat. Again, a needy crowd quickly gathers. People rush off and stretcher their sick friends and family to wherever Jesus can be found. And they receive compassion and healing. That's the of the bottom frame.

Compassion infuses this frame; people crowd around Jesus as soon as he arrives anywhere, and despite his fatigue, he doesn't send them away; he has compassion on them. He gives them the teaching and healing they seek. His disciples have just returned from doing teaching and healing work themselves, and now they're with Jesus sharing more of this same work. So this is the frame; what's the picture?

Mark puts two miracle stories into this compassion frame; the feeding of the 5,000, and Jesus walking on the water. We'll be looking at these stories next week in the version from John's Gospel. But today we've just got the compassion-frame and us.

So do we fit in this frame? I think we do. Lots of us here will feel that the image of the exhausted disciples picks up something about ourselves. And Jesus said weary disciples need to spend some time quietly; somewhere by ourselves, just with him. *So is that part of a picture of us that we find inside this compassion-frame?* Yes it is; in our daily prayer, in our friendship and fellowship with each other, and in the solace we share, it's a very real picture of us. But it's only a part of the picture.

Also in this frame is the image of people looking to see which way Jesus is moving and making sure they're headed that way

too. *So is that part of a picture of us that we find inside this compassion-frame?* Yes, though I think that's always a growing edge for us. But as long as it springs from genuine compassion – willingness to enter the sufferings of Christ's little ones and respond – we'll be on the right track.

And the people who bring their vulnerable ones to a place where they can make even the faintest contact with Jesus. *Is that part of a picture of us that we find inside this compassion-frame?* This is our most urgent task; to trust that the people we might bring to Jesus will truly meet him, and so to trust ourselves to do that – to learn together how to do that, and simply get on with it.

The frame we're looking at today is made to embrace a picture that embodies compassion; one which includes self-care, attention to Jesus and an urgent commitment to bring others to experience his healing love. That's the discipleship we're called to embody and teach as the living body of Christ in this place. Amen.