HOW TO BE A GOOD SHEPHERD LIKE JESUS

Mark 6:30-44

Key Verse: 6:37a “But he answered, “You give them something to eat.”

Jesus’ disciples are spiritual leaders. After Jesus called the twelve disciples, he planned to discipline them. No discipline, no disciples. Last week Jesus taught his disciples how to depend on God through a mission trip and helped them to believe in God’s sovereignty over the death of John the Baptist. Spiritual leaders must depend on God and believe His sovereign will and work. In today’s passage Jesus teaches us three qualifications to be a good shepherd like him.

First, be responsible:(30-37a) Look at verses30-31. “***The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. 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***.” Jesus knew that his disciples were tired and exhausted after returning from their mission trip. According to 6:12-13 they went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil, healing them. It was not easy to preach the message of repentance to others. Driving out demons was a fierce spiritual war. They had to fight against many impure and evil spirits until they came out of people. Their mission was so intense that they did not even have time to eat. Jesus knew what his disciples needed: rest! So, Jesus took a boat to cross the other side of the lake. A good shepherd should be mindful and considerate towards the needs of his sheep. Jesus understood his disciples’ situation and provided what they really needed. As Jesus said in John’s gospel, a good shepherd knows his sheep and his sheep know him. (Jn 10:14) In order to know his sheep, a shepherd always has to be attentive and sensitive to the sheep’s needs. He is also ready to serve them any time, any place, and in any situation.

Look at verses 32-33. “***So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.***” The crowd ruined the disciples’ plans. They heard the news of the disciples’ departure and ran on foot, arriving there ahead of them. How might the disciples feel about the crowd? Did the disciples welcome the crowd? I don’t think so. They must have been upset with them. They thought that the crowd was senseless and self-centered. How did Jesus feel about them? Let us read verse 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 was different from his disciples. He had compassion on the crowd because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Sheep are very vulnerable and dependent animals. They always live and move in groups because they have no ability to be independent. In fact, they can’t survive without a shepherd. Once they are scattered, they easily become prey of wild beasts or thieves. Compassion means suffering together, showing sympathy for the weak and the sick. Jesus had compassion on the crowd. A good shepherd is one who has compassion on his sheep. Our God is a good shepherd who is gracious and compassionate. He has compassion on us. He knows what we need. He knows our suffering. God had a compassion on his suffering people in Egypt. So, he delivered them and brought them to the desert where he fed them for 40 years until he led them to the Promised Land. Jesus did the same thing in this passage and is doing the same for us today. Amen!

Look at verses 35-36. “***By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. “This is a remote place,” they said, “and it’s already very late. Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.***” The disciples heard growling from their stomach and felt hungry. They thought about the crowd, too. So, they brought a very smart suggestion to Jesus. It was to send the crowd away so that they could feed themselves. They had enough reasons to support their idea: It was a remote place. There was no Bread Co., or Schnucks. It was too late to prepare such a huge amount of food for the crowd. They didn’t have money, either. As a result, the best solution is to send them away and let them find food themselves. “We don’t care whether they eat or not. It’s their problem, not our problem!’ It sounds very reasonable and smart, isn’t it? But, what did Jesus answer? In verse 37a Jesus said, “***You give them something to eat***.” Jesus meant that the disciples didn’t have to send the crowd away, but they had to feed them. The word “You” is emphasized here, pointing to the disciples. Jesus knew that his disciples had no money. He was well aware of all the reasons which the disciples brought to him. Still, Jesus challenged them to give something to the crowd. Why? What did Jesus want to teach them? Here Jesus taught his disciples to be responsible. Spiritual leaders should be responsible for their people. A good shepherd should be responsible, responsible for his sheep. Jesus compared a good shepherd to a hired hand. When wolves attack sheep, a good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep because he is responsible for his sheep. But a hired hand runs away because he is not responsible. A hired hand feeds sheep for money, but a good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

Second, be active (37b-38) How did the disciples respond to Jesus’ command? They said to him, “***That would take more than half a year’s wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?***” (37b) Half a year’s wages is around $ 35,000 in US currency. His disciples meant that they didn’t have such a large amount of money and that it was impossible to buy bread for such a large crowd. They also meant that they understood Jesus’ compassion, but that they were helpless for feeding the crowd. What did Jesus say to them? Look at verse 38. “***How many loaves do you have?” he asked, “Go and see.” When they found out, they said, “Five-- and two fish.***” Jesus did not want his disciples to only sit down and complain. He did not want them to give up. Jesus challenged them to do something with an obedient heart. There is a saying, “Where there is will, there is a way.” Jesus encouraged them to find a way to feed the crowd. So Jesus asked them to go and find something. A true leader is a man of action. He does not lead his people only with his lips, but with his action. Jesus commanded his disciples, “Go and see”, which meant “do something by faith.” In Exodus when God called Moses and commanded him to deliver the message to King Pharaoh, Moses made excuses not for him. God asked Moses to bring his staff which he carried all the time for shepherding. God used Moses’ staff as his five loaves and two fish, to deliver his people out of Egypt, divide the Red Sea, and lead his people to the Promised Land. Jesus asked his disciples to find the leftover bread. They found five loaves and two fish. To their eyes they were nothing for the five thousand. But to Jesus they were enough for the five thousand when the disciples brought them by faith.

Jesus did not want us to only sit down and complain about what we don’t have. Jesus wanted to do something by faith with what we have like Moses’ staff and the five loaves and two fish. Jesus wants us to go and see and bring our own five loaves and two fish to him. Jesus said, “*Go and see*.” Missionary Dr. Joseph Park visited the Wash U campus on Saturday for outreach. His weekly fishing is his five loaves. Our women missionaries also visited the campus and prayed. Their weekly one to ones and prayer meeting are their two fish. Kit’s one to one with Gemechu, Michael and Hershey's group study with young leaders, my daily visit and prayer at Wash U, are our five loaves and two fish. Because of the pandemic, our social and religious activities are largely restricted and limited. Still, we can go and see with an obedient heart, “Go and see!” A good shepherd is a man and woman of action, not of calculation.

Third, be co-operative (39-44) How did Jesus feed the crowd with the five loaves and two fish? Look at verses 39-44. “***Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, and he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand***.” Here we learn that Jesus did not work all by himself, but worked together with his disciples. A true leader knows how to work together with his people. God’s work is not a single man’s effort, but the work of co-operation. Karl Barth, the famous German theologian, said that the world mission is our participation in God’s redemptive work. We participate in God’s redemptive work. God himself works together as the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Recently one of our members got sick. Our missionaries worked together to encourage the sick person. They visited and prayed for the sick coworker. I believe that their beautiful coworking will bring a miracle to us. Compassion brings miracles.

What was the role of the disciples? They were grouping, distributing, and collecting. They divided the five thousand with one hundred fifties groups and let them sit down. They also distributed food for them and collected the leftovers. The crowd all ate and were satisfied. We don’t know exactly how Jesus fed the five thousand with the five loaves and the two fish, but this story is written in all four gospels. Jesus’ compassion brought one miracle after another. We also experience miracles when we have Jesus’ heart and eyes for the lost sheep. Students are coming back from their long winter break. They are like sheep without a shepherd. May God send us as a shepherd for them. Today we learn how to be a good shepherd like Jesus. A good shepherd is the one who is responsible, active, and co-operative. Above all, a good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep as Jesus did. May God raise 12 disciples of Jesus and good shepherds from Wash U and other main campuses in St. Louis! Amen!