

For us, who are children of God, to be like Christ, we need to know what Jesus was like. Now, the best way for us to come to know the person of Jesus Christ is through the words of the Gospel narrative. The Gospels reveal Jesus to us in ways we would never be able to know on our own. Why, if the gospels writers had not told us about his character, his mannerisms, his wit, his ability to become irritated with things, his strength of spirit, and his connection with God our Creator, would we really know who He is? Scripture reveals to us that Jesus was indeed both God and human.

The Gospels tell the story of the ministry of Jesus. But the gospels also tell the story of the disciples. You know them, right - his followers, his companions, and his students? With today's reading from Mark's gospel, we find Jesus has sent the disciples out to try their own wings, to preach the good news about the kingdom, to cure the sick, and to act with compassion toward those who would welcome their healing touch, and their words of hope for the coming of the kingdom of heaven into their lives.

Mark tells us the disciples had been sent out by Jesus, yet they did not fully understand everything Jesus did, nor did they understand everything about him. So, let's take a moment here and look back to the fourth chapter of Mark's gospel and particularly look at what happened in verses 35-41 in chapter 4. Jesus is asleep in the boat, while crossing the lake with his

disciples. A great gale arises and the disciples fear for their lives. They awake Jesus, who “rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’ Scripture tells us that the wind ceased, and the waters became calm. In fact, scripture says the waters became “dead calm”. ‘Dead calm’, why, that means with not even a tiny ripple. What power they must have been witnessing in what Jesus was doing. And Scripture goes on to tell us they did not understand what had just happened.

You know, the disciples found themselves in awe of this man, Jesus. They questioned among themselves, “Who is this, that the wind and the waves obey him?” Later, they would come to know Jesus to be no mere human being. And over time, they would come to see him as the living embodiment of the Creator, the embodiment of God living right there, in their midst.

We are very much like the disciples. We understand small fragments of the depth of the gospel story, but we see the face of God reflected dimly in our lives. It is in living our lives, day-by-day, that we experience God’s grace through the struggles and fears we endure. It is in faith that we grow in relationship with God, our Creator.

For the disciples, God’s truth was revealed to them because they had a first-person relationship with Jesus. Because of their growing faith in Jesus and his message, God opened their minds

to receive grace and blessings, and they were eager to learn more from Jesus. The leaders of the people of Israel, on the other hand, only saw Jesus as a problem. He was a threat, a threat which needed to be eliminated.

So, let's go back to today's gospel reading and look at what was happening for the disciples. They have just returned from their first mission to preach the good news, and to minister to others as healers of the sick and diseased. All of this happened without Jesus being there with them. Mark 6:30-34 tells us that the disciples returned to Jesus, excited about how they had been received, and how they cured the sick. They were pumped, they were encouraged, they were eager to share all they had seen and done. They were also tired and they needed rest. Rest which Jesus knew would prepare them for their upcoming experiences on their faith journey.

Jesus knew that they still had much to learn. He knew that this would happen as their ministries matured and grew.

Isn't this pretty much like our own journey in faith? There is so much we don't understand about God's kingdom and about Jesus, and his love for all creation. Yet we are being sent out into the world to serve, knowing that God has provided us with the Holy Spirit, who will reveal more and more of the truth as we journey in faith. Isn't that neat? I think it is. And for me, it is so exciting to find what door God will open next in my life.

But ministry comes with a cost. A cost to our personal well-being, emotional strength, and mental acuity. The disciples found themselves in the middle of a situation where they could not find time to look after their own well-being. Jesus recognized this in them and called the disciples to come away to rest and recharge. Jesus, again and again in the gospels, is said to have taken himself apart to a secluded place, to rest, recharge, and to pray to God for His blessing and grace. And so on this day, the disciples and Jesus took another boat ride to find a place to rest.

The gospel tells us that the crowds were able to reach the place they believed Jesus was taking the disciples, even before the boat the disciples were in, could reach the other shore. When Jesus saw the crowds waiting for their arrival, he did not send the crowds away. Mark tells us that Jesus had compassion upon them because he knew they were, "Like sheep without a shepherd."

Sheep without a shepherd are a disaster waiting to happen. They are easily panicked. They do not know where to go, where to find water for themselves, food, or even safety from predators. They need to be led. And here, Jesus has taken compassion upon them. He will lead them into learning God's plan of love for all creation.

Compassion is a very powerful word. Compassion means being moved by something so powerful that one responds to whatever has happened, by leaping into action. Mark tells us that Jesus was so moved by the sorry state of the crowds that he responded to their needs for food, healing, and for direction even though He and his disciples were spent, exhausted, and in need of solitude for themselves. Jesus was compassionate in his response because others were in need, and he knew he could help.

Our God is a compassionate God. Grace and blessing are God's way of responding to our needs. God does not wish anyone to perish from His kingdom. Jesus, the Beloved Son of our Creator, was the embodiment of God's compassion for all humankind. For us, as human beings, as children of God, and as Canadians, are in a place and time where compassion for those struggling with disasters and life's ups and downs, is paramount. And the need to come alongside others with love, and not with rage, anger, or malice, is the path we need to follow. We are all in need of healing and grace. So, let's stop the hurting and accept that we have failed in the past. And let's accept that we can chart a new path together, with God's help.

Pray for God's grace and blessing. Pray for all humankind. Be loving, be present to the needs of others around you. Be compassionate in everything you do. Take care of your own personal well-being. Seek solitude, seek rest, and embrace any

chance to recharge. Be like our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ who knew his own need for these very things. Isn't that what we hear in the gospel story for today?

Amen.