

ST. JOHN'S AT DIOCESAN CENTER IGLESIA EPISCOPAL DE SAN JUAN

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RUNNING TO TOUCH HIM

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Text of Sermon preached the 8th Sunday after Pentecost

July 18, 2021

JEREMIAH 23:1-6 | PSALM 23

EPHESIANS 2:11-22 | MARK 6:30-34, 53-56

While the early church understood in a general way that the arrest and death of John the Baptist was the beginning of the very public ministry of Jesus, Mark is the only Evangelist who gives us the details, and who wants us to meditate on this connection. John's disciples came to take away his body, Jesus' disciples returned from their first mission, shared their stories, and Jesus hurried them away from the crowds and the publicity.

Mark is a master story teller. He literally weaves a rich textured strand of interlocking events that bring out the deeper meaning of each story as they come together, circle back on each other, and resonate with the hearer. A 12 year old girl is raised from the dead, but not before a woman sick for 12 years touches Jesus' garment and is healed. Jesus sends out his disciples, giving them his power and authority, John makes his last prophetic stand, the disciples return, Jesus whisks them away, but the crowds follow. Jesus feeds them outside the city, but sends his disciples yet again away to the far side of the lake to the countryside, hoping to give them a moment to reflect. Jesus goes up to a mountain to pray. The word travels. He catches up with his disciples on the water, but they are afraid and still do not understand how Jesus provides in every situation. They land in the countryside and the crowds somehow find them. Jesus power continues to go work in every change of plans, every shifting context.

“When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.”

We are celebrating a baptism today. We might do well to imagine ourselves having run here, dropped whatever we were doing, grabbed our neighbor who has just returned from chemotherapy, remembered what it was we were asking God for in our prayers last night, and come to see the power of Jesus. Oh that we might just touch the hem of his garment.

Baptism is a beautiful sacrament. It is a promise that by uniting ourselves to Christ in his death and resurrection, by bearing his name and the sign of his cross in our body, we too will die and rise with him. We too are members of this family that is gathered together from the four corners of the earth to bring healing and restoration to all.

As the Prayer Book says: “The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God, and each other, in Christ.” Today, let us

imagine that restoring power drawing us here like a magnet. I pray we would feel that we cannot resist it. We need God's power. We need it to bring us together. We need it to make us in his image, to make us new.

It is also wonderful that this great power, this great passion in us, is protected by the source of all compassion in Christ. This healing power, this potential for change, does not come from a place of show or a need to prove anything. It comes from the heart of true leadership, of the one who knows what is needed to truly take care of the flock.

A true leader, a true shepherd who rules with compassion, understands all the ways trauma affects us, all the sources of the stresses that build up, that scar us, that take up residence in our bodies, minds and souls, that we don't know how to deal with, that we cannot free ourselves from. The good shepherd leads us beside still waters and restores our soul.

I found myself in the Emergency Room this week with a small problem with my eye, that at the end of the day, might signal a more important need to lower my blood pressure, pay attention to a greater healing needed in my body and soul.

Yet in the middle of this week, while wrestling with my own stress and pain, I was blessed to be able to see the power of compassion work for a dear friend. She had recently had to relive a traumatic series of events from last year when flooding and poor maintenance forced her to move out of her apartment. The move happened in the same month as the death of her mother. Her entire personality changed. She had needed anxiety medication. And just a little allowed her to come back to herself.

She had been doing well, but reliving these events triggered the whole cycle all over again. On this day, however, months later, she was having trouble getting the medication from her doctors. She was beside herself. Possessed by the anxiety. She approached me on the street and warned me not to give her any advice. She said: I'm not talking to you. So, the next day she reminded me, no advice, but I'll tell you what's going on. She just wanted me to listen. And so I did. And I prayed for her and her doctors in Jesus name.

The next days she returned with a smile on her face. She actually was still waiting for her medication. But the change came when she knew that she was heard, that I heard her, that the God of all compassion had her cry and set things in motion. Jesus was on his way to her. She was on her way to her healing.

The power of God's word is that the promise is sure. As Jeremiah saw, no matter how many bad shepherds there are, how much bad advice out there in the world, we may come directly to the wise ruler that God has provided.

We do not have have to run far. Baptized, we bear the Name of this great king and shepherd. At any time, we may call upon the Name and Power of Jesus. Right now we can touch the hem of his garment and know that our change is on the way!