

Eight Sunday after Pentecost
July 19, 2015
[Mark 6:30-34, 53-56](#)

“LEADERSHIP, COMPASSION, and ISIS”

Friday night I attended Bootless Theatre’s production.
It was great to have our social hall filled with mostly 20 and 30 year olds --
albeit to see something entitled: *Evil Dead*.
Chain saws, demons, and fake blood made up the theme of the evening.

I was sitting next to an actor
who makes a living by selling programs on leadership to companies.
They teach leaders how to be leaders.

That reminded me of today’s Bible story; so, of course,
I told him the most surprising thing about this text
(all the while, I know he’s thinking this is too weird this woman is talking to
me about Jesus; let me out of here)

but I said,
Jesus and his disciples are trying to get away for some rest
when all these people come clambering up to them
and even though he is weary and so are his disciples
and even though they are trying to get themselves to a lonely place
away from everyone

“Jesus looks upon the crowds
and has compassion upon them for they are
like sheep without a shepherd . . .”

and then the sentence ends,
not with what one might expect.

Because having compassion upon them,
we expect that Jesus is going to
What?
Heal them or
feed them or
stop and listen to their stories.

Three things he’s always doing.

But instead, he shows his compassion
by teaching them!

It's a new way, not just of thinking about compassion,
but of understanding SHEPHERD as well.

If we think of Jesus the Good Shepherd from the gospel of John,
we imagine
one that protects the sheep
one that gathers the sheep
one that seeks out the lost sheep
one who carries the sheep and watches over them.

But in, with, and under all this,
though we never think about it,
is teaching.

If you think about it:
how do we seek to protect our children?
By teaching them we would probably say right from wrong.

What do we hope when they grow up and live away from us?
That what we have taught them, they have learned;
that it's part of their DNA; that it will protect them.

Sheep without a shepherd;
children without parents;
or children with parents who are so self-absorbed they do not have
compassion --

Compassion means suffer with
and to suffer with someone
is to let go of ourselves and enter into their world.

So Jesus leaves behind his own tiredness,
his own need to be alone
and enters into the world of these sheep without a shepherd
in order to teach them.

There are several things that struck me about this.

First of all,
there are so many leaders who don't teach.

I think it's one of the worst aspects of our political system
that so many elected leaders purposely mislead people
rather than educate:

"These are the facts; these are the different
possibilities; if we do this, this will happen;
if we do that, this will happen.

I believe we should do this and this is why."

Leaders should give people what they need so that people can make educated
decisions.

It's key to Jesus' understanding of leadership,
that a leader, the shepherd teaches the sheep.
The shepherd gives the sheep what they need to live.

The second thing that strikes me is:
there are a lot of shepherd less sheep out there --
people who are lost.

An article in the NYT two weeks ago had this title:
"ISIS and the Lonely Young American."

It was about a young woman from Washington State who was courted online
by ISIS members who were very good at pretending they cared about her and
spent a lot of time teaching her about Islam albeit in their perverted
understanding of it.

One of the things that was hard in the article was
that she was a Sunday school teacher at church
and her online conversations with the Islamists led her to meet with the
pastor and ask if our belief in the Trinity meant we were polytheists.
The article said that the pastor was friendly for 15 minutes and then led her
out of his office telling her she needed to trust more in the mystery of God.

It makes one wonder, "What if the pastor had spent more time with her?"

His 15 minutes didn't begin to compare with the hours and hours the
Islamists were spending with her online.

But who has 8 hours at a time to spend with one person?

We can't do that.

That would be utterly impossible and exhausting.

Wouldn't it?

And yet, if we truly wanted to "save someone" wouldn't we do that?

Jesus and the disciples are exhausted, but they stop and have compassion on the people and teach.

Does anyone else ever think this way?

If only we could have gotten a hold of Dylan Roof and taught him a different way than the way of hate and exclusion he learned from supremacists groups online (he's the one who shot the 9 people in Charleston).

And if he truly was a member of a Lutheran church and confirmed there (that's what our national bishop's letter said) -- what does that mean?

Am I the only one highly disturbed by that?

I think of the pastor in Washington State reading about himself in the paper (he's unnamed) -- maybe he was tired that day this young woman asked for an explanation of the Trinity -- he isn't Jesus -- and needed to get to the lonely place away to pray and rest.

But what does it mean that she had converted to Islam but was teaching Sunday school in a Christian church? Not that there aren't Muslims who could teach a better Sunday school lesson than some Christians.

But how/why do we miss so much?

And is it because we are too busy and too tired

or are we too self-absorbed

or too overwhelmed

or think that love means minding our own business?

or are we just not Jesus?

It's hard to understand what Jesus is teaching in this chapter because it's all broken up but if you were here last week you would have heard the story of King Herod's birthday party.

He invited the leading political, military, and business leaders of Galilee to his party where we assume much fancy food and alcohol was served. Herod has his little daughter dance for the men; and then feeling proud and in a boastful mood, he tells his daughter to ask for anything, anything at all and he will give it to her.

At the urging of her mother she asks for John the Baptist's head, and because Herod does not want to lose face -- John loses his head.

It's after this appalling story of this pitiful excuse for a leader who could have stopped and taught his company who John the Baptist was because in this story it says Herod thought he was a holy man that we have today's words: "They were like sheep without a shepherd."

King Herod and the leading men of Galilee -- this is the Jewish leadership.

Having expensive parties while the people go hungry, having little girls dance before drunken men, bragging and weak, saving face rather than saving a man's life. No wonder the people are lost. Like sheep without a shepherd

ISIS, Charleston, Tennessee, King Herod beheading John. The world is not such a different place.

And Jesus' teaching remains true- While the Herods of the world give their banquets for their friends, Jesus' friends gather at a different meal.

The 19 verses missing in today's reading are Jesus' feeding of the 5000 out in the desert where everyone is fed until they are satisfied

pointing to this simple meal laid before us this morning:

Bread and wine
Christ's body and blood
Given to us; given for us
To teach us another way
A way of compassionate leadership
A way that does not leave the sheep lost and shepherd less

But teaches them another way
A way of compassion, a way of teaching, a way of feeding that leaves not just
some but everyone satisfied.

Amen.

The Reverend Dianne O. Loufman
July 19, 2015