**First Reading Jeremiah 23:1-6**

*Jeremiah prophesied before the exile in 587 BCE. In this passage, he uses the metaphor of a shepherd to describe the bad kings who have scattered the “flock” of Israel. God promises to gather the flock and to raise up a new king from David’s line to save Israel and Judah.*

1 Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the Lord. 2 Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So, I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the Lord. 3 Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. 4 I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the Lord. 5 The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. 6 In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: “The Lord is our righteousness.”

**Psalm 23**

1 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want. 2 The Lord makes me lie down in green pastures and leads me beside still waters. 3 You restore my soul, O Lord, and guide me along right pathways for your name’s sake. 4 Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil, and my cup is running over. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

**Second Reading Ephesians 2:11-22**

*The author of this letter reminds his audience that originally, they were not part of God’s chosen people. Through Jesus’ death, however, they are included in God’s household of faith, whose cornerstone is Jesus Christ.*

11 Remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called “the uncircumcision” by those who are called “the circumcision”—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands—12 remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth

of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. 15 He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, 16 and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. 17 So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; 18 for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, 20 built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. 21 In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; 22 in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

**Gospel Mark 6:30-34, 53-56**

*When Jesus sends his disciples out to teach and heal, they minister among large numbers of people. Their work is motivated by Christ’s desire to be among those in need.*

30 The apostles gathered around Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. 31 He said to them, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. 32 And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. 33 Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. 34 As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. 53 When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. 54 When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, 55 and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. 56 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.

**Sermon**

It is easy for us to imagine the way in which the promise of “free stuff” draws a crowd. A buy one, get one free deal brings out more customers than usual, to the point that Rulli Brothers puts a limit on how many items can be bought per transaction. Free cone day at your favorite ice cream place results in long lines. Any event that includes free food rather than buying food from vendors will draw more people. The point is that we know in our society it’s a big deal when something is being given away for free. Many of us were probably told growing up that nothing is life is for free. So, when something IS free, we jump at the chance to benefit from it.

It may look like this is what is happening in the gospel passage today…people running around trying to receive some benefit from Jesus that they heard he is giving. But it is important to know something about life in Jesus’ day. Life for the common person in Jesus’ day was hard. Most of the common people worked to live and that was the extent of their existence. There was no expectation that they would ever get ahead or be comfortable. They worked long hours and paid a lot of taxes to Rome. The greater threat was that something would happen to sink them…the weather impacting their work, a serious injury or illness, debilitating physical disability, a debt that needed to be paid, a death in the family. Any of these could drive a woman, children, a family into poverty. And there was very little, if any, help when that happened. There was a religious system functioning in that day. But there was very little help.

What is happening with Jesus is that something is suddenly different. Jesus is changing life in a way that was not within the realm of possibility before. He has been healing people, teaching and spending time with common people. They are hearing things that make them want to sit with him and listen some more. So, after Jesus’ apostles came back from doing Jesus’ work, Jesus invites them to come and rest in a deserted place. But as they try to do so, the crowds arrive there. And look what it says in verse 34, “As Jesus went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.” Jesus looked at those people, and he was one of the only people to ever look at them and see them for who they were…people who needed compassion.

This passage from Mark 6 can be given the title, “Jesus demonstrates compassion.” Now in other gospels, it goes a bit further as to say that the people were “harassed and helpless,” but we certainly get the sense that they are desperate to be near Jesus, his presence, his message. So, Jesus begins to teach them many things. But he doesn’t stop there. You’ll notice that there are some verses that have been skipped this week…verses 35-52. Those verse contain the story of Jesus feeding the 5000. Although we aren’t going to read it, it adds an important dimension to the story. Jesus’ compassion for these shepherd-less people is demonstrated by sitting with them, teaching AND feeding them.

I hope that this compassionate response of Jesus sounds oddly familiar to you, particularly because we had Psalm 23 as our assigned psalm for the day. “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.” In this way, Jesus cares for, demonstrates compassion for these harassed people, people who have had very little support, very little hope before now. Jesus teaches, Jesus feeds and then, once again, on the other side of the sea once again, Jesus heals.

There is certainly a very important spiritual component to Jesus’ compassion. He spends time. He sits with them. He speaks to them about God in a way they had never really heard before, which is what draws them to him. Jesus reveals God’s compassionate presence with humanity when humanity is driving humanity into the ground. Jesus reveals God’s compassionate presence with humanity for times when humanity believes God has distanced the divine presence from humanity. This spiritual component is greatly significant, otherwise Jesus would not have had to die on the cross for our salvation.

But hand-in-hand with that component of Jesus’ compassion is the act of feeding the people. This is a reminder to us that the life God intended for all of humanity to have was a life of provision, a life in which people had enough to live on. And if people didn’t have enough to live on, the others would help provide for them. This was not happening for people in Jesus’ day, and it is not happening in our day either. Sometimes people go after free stuff in our day because it is a nice break for a change to get something and not have to work so incredibly hard. And sometimes people go after free stuff in our day because they need it…they need the food, they need the clothes, they need whatever because they can’t buy it.

Today we get a picture of the compassion that Jesus has for all of humanity, and it is both spiritual and material. The presence of God is with us to love and forgive us AND the

presence of God is with us to teach us to love one another and all of God’s human creation with the compassionate love of Jesus. Compassion is lacking in the world around us. So, we look to Jesus, the model of compassion who saves us all through the compassionate love of God so that we may be compassionate toward those who are suffering among us today. Amen.