

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen

The world is full of an overwhelming amount of human need.

We hear it here during our prayer time;

So much sickness and pain.

So many people struggling in one way or another.

Sometimes it can just be too much.

I can't tell you how many times I've heard people say that they can't even watch the news anymore.

Sometimes the overwhelming human need around us is just too much

And we have to shut ourselves off from it, at least for a little while.

One of the things I learned from working for the City of Philadelphia in the juvenile justice system, is that one has two choices when working in a broken system that perpetuates human suffering rather than fixes it, you either quit or you just stop caring.

There's actually a sociological term for it.

It's called "compassion fatigue"

Now compassion means "to feel with"

So compassion fatigue refers to the gradual lessening of the ability to "feel for and with" others.

It was first identified in nurses during the 1950s.

And since that time it has been identified mostly in individuals who work in trauma.

But some believe that it can happen to any of us,

In fact, Journalism analysts argue that the media has caused widespread compassion fatigue in society

by saturating newspapers and TV news programs with images and stories of suffering

They say that when we watch violence, suffering and pain, day in and day out, it weakens our ability to feel compassion for others.

So even though most human beings do have the capacity to feel compassion for others...

none of us can sustain that compassion on a constant basis.

That's part of our human limitation

And with all the images that we see each day, we may actually be weakening our already limited capacity.

I wonder if the disciples were suffering from compassion fatigue?

When the disciples returned from their mission, they were excited.

They couldn't wait to share their experiences with Jesus.

They wanted to tell him about all the ways in which they healed and taught and cast out demons in his name.

They were excited,
but they were also exhausted.
They had seen much suffering.
They had experienced much human pain.
And it drained them.
And Jesus knew it.
So like a good parent...or a good shepherd,
Jesus said, "come on, you need to rest."

In this part of our passage, Mark now calls the disciples...apostles
And there is a reason for that....
The change in their name reflects the change in their role.
Disciples are students, receivers of information
But now they were to be "sent one"
Givers of God's grace and love.

Earlier in this chapter, we heard that Jesus sent them out in pairs to do his work.
And they had done just what he instructed them to do.
They had gone out into the world to preach and teach and heal.
And now that they had completed their task,
They were tired.

But they also learned very quickly that human need doesn't take a vacation.
Even on their way to a "deserted place" to rest, the crowds followed them.
And Jesus was so moved with compassion for them, that he stopped and healed them.

Jesus was so moved with compassion that he began to teach them;

(now the way our text for today is presented in the lectionary, it is chopped up)
we jump from verse 34 to verse 53.)

But between those two verses something really important happens.
that shows us that the apostles were not able to muster as much
compassion for the crowds as their master did.

It tells us that Jesus taught well into the night and the crowds became
hungry.

So the apostles tell Jesus, "look it's late. This is a deserted place, send the
crowds away, back to the villages, so that they can buy something to eat"

But Jesus said to them...You give them something to eat.

I wonder if the apostles were suffering from compassion fatigue? .
You see, even though all of us are capable of compassion for others.

None of us are capable of sustaining the constancy of compassion that Jesus
has....none of us.

Because only God can extend constant compassion.
God is the only one who can love constantly, serve constantly, forgive constantly,
extend mercy constantly.

God is the only one who never slumbers or sleeps.
The only one who never tires of humanity's need.

That's the good news about our God.

God loves us constantly, and God is constantly moved by our needs and by the needs of the whole world.

That's what Jesus came to show us that God is so moved by our human plight that Jesus was willing to die to free us from sin and death;
From pain and suffering.

But where does that leave us?
How are we to be God's "sent ones" if our capacity to love and serve is limited?
Can God still use us?

The answer is "yes"

That's the beauty of the gospel story

What our text shows us today is that even the first apostles were limited in their ability to love and serve,

Yet, God was still able to use them in amazing ways;

They went out with nothing but Jesus' name, and they were able to heal the sick and cast out demons.

It wasn't their own abilities that made that happen.

It wasn't that they had some superhuman amount of compassion or faith,

Instead, it was Jesus' power that made it happen.

It was Jesus' compassion that sustained them.

As human beings, it is important that we don't set ourselves up to fail.
thinking that we can be God.

We can't.

But we **can** God's "sent ones", who like the apostles,
Allow God to work through us even in spite of our limitations.

You see, Jesus' compassion was constant;
He was capable of extreme love, extreme mercy.

But we need a little more balance than Jesus did.

And it seems that the original twelve's balance between being disciples and being apostles is a good model.

As disciples, they received....from Jesus

They were taught, and fed, and strengthened, and loved.

We, too, need time to receive God's gifts of love and strength and forgiveness.

And then after they were empowered, they were ready to be sent.

sent to serve and love and share Jesus' healing presence with others.

It's like the airline instructions...put on your own oxygen mask first
before you assist others with theirs.

Sometimes we need to be disciples...to learn and sit at Jesus' feet.
To rest and to receive.
and sometimes we are called to be apostles..."sent ones"
who take the message out and share it.

But then the question is:

How can we take that time when there are so many needy people?
How will God's compassion be felt without us?
How do I not feel guilty when I'm just too tired to respond?

Well, you see that is the beauty of the Body of Christ.
None of us is the body "in and of ourselves"
The body if made up of all of us.
When one person is receiving, another is still giving.
When that person needs to rest, another member of the Body steps up to serve.

I've seen it here at LCR, even in our little part of the Body of Christ.
When one of us gets saturated and can't seem to muster compassion for
those around us,
There is another who is moved and sparked to service.
And their actions, then in turn, spark us to movement again.
and the cycle continues over and over again,
so that the Body of Christ is always moving...always being sent out....

God's compassion and mercy is constant.
It never fails.

May we, as the Body of Christ, find balance in our roles as disciples and
apostles so that all the world's people may feel God's compassion and love.
Amen