

The Care of Christ

Jeremiah 23:1-6

Psalm 23

Ephesians 2:13-18

Mark 6:30-34

I recently ran across an article entitled, “Here’s a dime. Call someone who cares.” A dime? Are there still payphones in the United States? Do they still just take a dime?! That is absurd! Most of us have heard this phrase before. I’ve always heard it used with a quarter, however, instead of dime. I’m pretty sure that if a person actually found a payphone today, it would cost even more than a quarter! Regardless, the phrase reminds us that very few people seem to care about what we’ve been through. However, our Gospel reading today tells us that there is One who *does* care—Jesus Christ.

Our Gospel reading today offers us a great opportunity to hear about the amazing care of Christ. Some of you might remember last week’s Gospel reading—Jesus sent the Twelve out in pairs to various towns to spread the Good News and to heal. Our reading today picks up with the disciples’ return.

The Apostles must have been physically exhausted, but spiritually ecstatic. Through their prayers and the use of Jesus’ name they had seen many demons flee and witnessed many healings. They had seen people respond in great faith to their message. This must have been extremely energizing. Yet, they were also physically exhausted. They had walked to many towns and villages. They had been rejected by some and denied food and water by others. Their excitement and fatigue must have been quite obvious as they returned to Jesus. All of this sets the scene for us to see Jesus’ beautiful care for them.

The Gospel writer of Matthew reports that Jesus told His disciples, “Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.”¹ We also read that people were crowding in on the Apostles, so much so that they couldn’t even eat after their long journey. So Jesus took them off by themselves to a deserted place.² While this Scripture story does not explicitly tell us what was going on in Jesus’ head and heart, I know that He must have been extremely interested in hearing about the ministry experiences of His Apostles. He must have also been very concerned about their physical well-being. He knew they were tired, yet excited. So Jesus took them away so they could eat and sleep and share with Him the exciting news of their journey.

One of the most important lessons that we learn as Christians is that Jesus cares for us. He desires for us to have rest, relaxation, and peace. He desires for us to be replenished and rejuvenated for the service He has in store for us. He does not want us to run on a proverbial empty tank and to become burned-out and apathetic in our service.

I had been ordained about seven years before I became aware of the fact that Christ cared for my well-being; that He desired for me to have a day off and a vacation; that He desired for me to have some time each day for rest, reading, cooking, and eating, etc. It is still sometimes difficult for me to get that reality from my head into my heart! Jesus cared *that much* for His Apostles and He cares *that much* for each of us! In the words of the first letter of Peter, “Cast all your worries upon him because he cares for you.”

¹ Mark 6:31

² Mark 6:32

Jesus' care did not stop with the Apostles. As the story of our Gospel reading continued, we heard about Christ's care for crowd that had followed Him and the Twelve. The crowd was SO needy that it actually figured out where Jesus was going with the Apostles and beat them to the place! In verse 34 we read about Jesus' loving care, "When [Jesus] disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things" (Mark 6:34). In addition to this being yet another reminder of just how caring Jesus is to us, it is also a challenge for us to imitate His care. This is an extremely difficult thing to do!

Have you ever looked forward to some time alone? Maybe you planned to spend an evening reading a book or listening to music. Maybe you went to a favorite coffee house with the expectation of enjoying a quiet mocha alone. But when you arrived, you found someone already there... needing something... maybe it was a kid needing attention, a spouse needing conversation (or attention), an acquaintance wanting to talk, a friend hoping to catch up on news, or any number of things. It is SO difficult to set aside our own desires in order to care for another person when our desires have become expectations. It's even harder when our desire and expectation involves helping someone else—like a parent who is helping one kid when another child becomes demanding, or the parents who are trying to visit with one another about something important and one of the children needs something, or when we're on the phone talking to one person and another person is calling needing something. It's hard to care for all of the people in our lives, especially if we mistakenly believe that our care is quantitative.

Jesus shows us in the Gospel today that care is qualitative, not quantitative. In other words, God will give us the grace to care for more people than we can ever imagine. There is not a storehouse of care in our hearts that gets depleted and must be, therefore, rationed to those whom we love. Jesus allowed Himself to move from caring for the Apostles to caring for the crowd without being concerned if there would be enough!

Jesus' care doesn't cost us a dime! He freely gives it to us out of the great love He has for us. This week, let's be particularly mindful of Christ's care for us, as well as challenge ourselves to be more caring with one another.

SUGGESTED PRAYER EXERCISES:

- ✚ At the end of each day this week, take a few minutes to review the day and ask the Lord the question, "When was I lovingly responsive today, Jesus?" "When did I fail to respond to the needs of others in a loving way?"
- ✚ Read Psalm 23 and think about how it describes the loving responsiveness of God. Then, re-write Psalm 23 and let it express your own gratitude for the specific ways that God has been responsive to you lately.