

Mathew 9:35-10:8

June 17-18, 2017 used some of 7/8/84

How do you feel about crowds?

Summer is the season for crowds. This week there will be crowds at:

Billy Joel concert at Lambeau,

Strawberry Fest in Waupaca

Butterfly Festival in Appleton, Midwest Sunsplash Music

Fest in Menasha,

A couple of area Juneteenth Celebrations.

Father's day at the New Zoo or Bay Beach.

Father's Day 5 K and kids' fun run.

And of course at all of the baseball diamonds, soccer fields and swimming pools.

So we all know about crowds. right?

But how do you feel in a crowd?

Sometimes being in a crowd makes us feel happy, with a sense of belonging and comradery.

Sometimes they energize us or if we are people-watchers, crowds can give us plenty of opportunities for a good laugh.

Sometimes we might feel lonely.

Or competitive. Or combative. Or just plain crabby.

Well Jesus knew about crowds too.

Wherever he went, a crowd gathered.

He was known for his teaching, and preaching and healing, so when Jesus arrived in town, crowds of people came to witness his ministry.

All of this attention might have made Jesus tired, or impatient or skeptical but that is not what happened.

In today's reading from Matthew, we are told that when the crowds flocked around him, Jesus felt compassion. Jesus saw them like sheep without a shepherd. (no pun intended.)

That's an appropriate image, because when a flock has been neglected, they quickly become sick, exhausted and confused and that's what Jesus saw in the crowd around him.

And so he had compassion on them.

Compassion is a powerful word; it is more than pity.

In Greek it means "*gut feeling*" and it is not surprising that this word is central to some of our favorite Bible stories.

- In the parable of the Prodigal Son, a compassionate father forgives his runaway son.
- In the story of the Good Samaritan, a compassionate outsider cares for man left for dead.
- And in the story of an Unforgiving Servant, a compassionate king writes off the debt of his servant.

Compassion is a deep love, a love that comforts and forgives.

Compassion sees hopes and hurts, fears and longing.

Compassion is a person to person, heart to heart kind of thing.

Compassion is the experience of the pain that comes with sacrificial love.

In fact it was the gift of God's compassion for fallen humanity that took Jesus to the cross.

Compassion was important for the people of Jesus' day and it is important for us today.

Knowing that God cares about me can go a long way on a “Blue Monday” or in the midst of an irritating encounter with a store’s checkout clerk.

God’s compassion is even more important in some of life’s bigger challenges.

I remember the words of a childless couple who desperately wanted children but had not yet been able to conceive.

It was close to Mother’s Day. Relatives had no clue about their struggle and had inadvertently said some hurtful things.

The wife told me how hard it was being in church when there was a Baptism because it was a reminder of her deep longing for a child. She added that, “no one seems to get it but it helps to remember that God knows what is in our hearts and cares.” She went on to remember a Lenten sermon I preached about Jesus weeping for Lazarus.

She believed that when she cried, Jesus cried too.

That made all the difference for her.

However, sometimes Jesus’ words are not enough. Those are the times when we need to become the hands of Christ. You know, like God’s Work; Our Hands.”

Do you remember a time when you were a kid, home sick with the flu, high fever, sick stomach and your mom or dad or Grandparent placed a warm comforting hand on your forehead? Few words may have been spoken but the comfort of that touch went a long way to soothe the pain.

Or can you think of a time when you were really mad at someone?

Maybe a roommate, a neighbor, or a relative.

Maybe you were so mad that you look him right in the eyes and said something mean. You knew it was wrong but you said it anyway.

Or maybe you did something that turned out all wrong and people got mad at you?

We have all made those kind of mistakes and the result is that we feel guilty and hurt and we wonder if we’ll ever get over it.

But it is into those kinds of messes that God speaks a compassionate work of forgiveness and God’s forgiveness is so powerful that it can help us work toward reconciliation in the toughest of experiences.

Whatever it is that you face today, right now:

pain, doubt, alienation, anger, exhaustion, guilt,
whatever may be lying beneath the surface,

God will continue to have compassion on you.

God cares for you and loves you so much that he will come to you and touch your life, exactly where you hurt the most.

The good news is that it is because of this deep love for us, that God has also empowered us to respond to the physical, and spiritual needs of others.

Like the disciples, we are claimed as God’s own and are called to be Christ’s representatives in the world.

Today I read the names of the 12 disciples who Jesus called to minister to the needs of the crowds.

You can add your name to that list. We too belong to God and it is our privilege that through us, others will come to know and rejoice in the compassion of Jesus Christ.

So this week, wherever life takes you and whether you are celebrating Father's Day with family or braving the crowds of some Summer Festival, may you find comfort in knowing that God loves you always and when needed will have compassion on you.

This is the good news of the Gospel. Amen