

Prayer: Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.

Last Sunday, we looked at compassion and its value in our lives. You may remember last week's scripture said Jesus had compassion for the crowds and healed them. Compassion: recognizing a need and then taking action, doing something to relieve the need, address the suffering. Jesus recognized the need and healed the sick. You may also remember I discussed several personal benefits to being compassionate. Not only are we keeping God's directive to care for the poor and sick, but when we do, God has wired us so we receive an emotional benefit from doing so. A double blessing.

I hope all of you have stories to share at coffee hour about how you've been compassionate this past week.

When you heard what I said last week about compassion, I'm sure that some of you said that's all fine and dandy, but what happens when you don't have enough energy to be compassionate. Some of you may have experienced what is often called compassion fatigue. You may have thought it was nice that Jesus kept on when he was grieving – after all he was God-come-to-earth. "Surely," you thought, "Jesus had resources I don't have." For you personally – you may have had moments where you've been compassionated-out.

You may be thinking to yourself, "So, Lee, what do you have to say about being compassionated-out?" I'd say being compassionated-out is an entirely human reaction. We are not like the Energizer Bunny who keeps going and going. We need to take time and rest – just like Jesus does in today's reading from Matthew.

Jesus may have been God-come-to-earth, but he was also, at the same time, human. He experienced the same emotions we experience. Let me read verse 22 and 23 again. **Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone.** Sounds like Jesus was compassionated-out and took action to recover.

Jesus didn't have the opportunity to rest before he fed the 5000, but he certainly takes the opportunity to rest now. Rather, he makes the opportunity to rest and retreat now. Look at the word 'made.' Jesus made the disciples get in the boat and go ahead of him. The disciples may have protested that they wanted Jesus with them, but Jesus had other plans. I believe he wanted, he probably needed, to be by himself. If we use today's vocabulary, Jesus just may have been experiencing compassion fatigue. Jesus may have been compassionated-out. Jesus needed the time to get away, pray and regain his center.

Jesus was human and he needed time to rest and pray to connect with God. What can we learn from this part of the scripture? Following Jesus' example, take time, make time, for yourself to rest and pray so you can continue serving God with compassionate action.

From the scripture, we can suppose that Jesus did get his alone-time with God. That time alone must have refreshed him enough to walk a distance – on the water - to catch up with the disciples' boat, which was in trouble. Matthew, the narrator of this story, tells us that the boat was battered by the waves and was far from land.

Storms do come up on the Sea of Galilee rather suddenly because of the mountains that surround the Sea. Many of the disciples were experienced fishermen. They had spent plenty of time fishing at night on this Sea and knew how ferocious, how fierce, storms can be on the Sea of Galilee. The disciples were experienced, but they were still in the center of a storm fighting to keep the boat on course. The scripture says the wind was against them. The wind wasn't helping them sail to their destination.

We know that Jesus had compassion on the disciples and calmed the storm. The scripture tells us that. But what can we say about Peter. Much has been made of Peter getting out of the boat and walking towards Jesus. There are probably more explanations of this event than there are days in the year. But today, I'd for us to look at this event from one simple perspective.

There are thirteen people in this story, but there are three actors: Jesus, Peter and the eleven disciples who are treated as one voice in this story. What was the impact on the storyline of Peter getting out of the boat? Peter's action, the risk he took, had an impact on all the disciples.

Let's look at the story from when Jesus approached the boat. The disciples are terrified. They think Jesus is a ghost. It was late and they were tired. Perhaps Jesus didn't look like the tired Jesus they had left of the shore a few hours before. Perhaps they weren't familiar with a rested, refreshed Jesus. They certainly didn't expect Jesus to be walking on water! Whatever the reason, the disciples were terrified, **"It is a ghost!"**

Now, let's skip to what happens when they are all in the boat together. The scripture says: **When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."** What was the result of Peter's getting out of the boat, taking that risk? The fear dissolved. All the disciples recognized Jesus as the Son of God. This was the first time in Matthew that the disciples recognized Jesus as divine. You may remember an earlier storm story where Jesus was asleep in the boat and the disciples woke him up and asked him to save them. Jesus was sleeping through a storm that the disciples thought was life-threatening. What happened? Jesus woke up and calmed the storm. In that storm story, the scripture says the disciples questioned who this was that calmed the sea and storm.

In today's storm story, due to Peter's risk, the disciples saw Jesus in a different light. Jesus did calm the storm, but Jesus had walked on water and saved Peter. Jesus was now seen as the Son of God.

The simple lesson I'd like for you to take away about Peter? He took a faith risk and changed the whole community. The disciples no longer questioned who Jesus was, but recognized Jesus for who he was - the Son of God. Peter's bold risk made a difference in the lives of the disciples.

One person's risk can move a faith community forward. One person's risk can make a difference. What have you risked recently to move your faith or the faith of this community forward?

We need rest and prayer. But we can't stay up in the mountains, praying and resting. We need to follow Jesus' example and come back down the hill and be compassionate.

We also need to take risks for Jesus. We need to get out of our comfort zone. It may be the risk of compassionate action seeing suffering and doing something about it. It may be telling someone about your faith and inviting her or him to church. Whatever it is, risk boldly. Jesus is there to take your hand and save you if you start to sink.