

Jesus invites the apostles and us to cross over the lake again. Remember a few weeks ago we reflected on the passage where Jesus invited the apostles to cross over the lake? How that passage was really a test to see if they had crossed over from fear to faith? The apostles completely failed that test and the episode ended with the question: "Have you no faith?"

We can be sure that Jesus has another lesson in mind for this second crossing. Just a reminder that in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus rarely teaches anything directly. We always have to look at the action of the scene and the inner state of those involved to understand what Jesus is teaching.

When the apostles reach the other shore, we see what the lesson is. Please put on your "geek identity" for just a moment. The translation we heard today said that Jesus "was moved with pity for them." The Greek is very clear. It was not pity that Jesus felt; it was "compassion."

"Esplanchnisthe." He felt compassion. The difference between pity and compassion is critical for understanding the lesson Jesus teaches in today's gospel.

Pity is not a bad thing; it is feeling sorry for someone. It is a step in the right direction: "I feel sorry for you." It might move us to do something to help like making a donation. Pity is not generally descriptive of a relationship between equals: You have a need; let me help.

Compassion on the other hand, is something much deeper. Compassion means “to suffer with.”

When you suffer, I suffer. It is to be one with the other in their pain and anguish. Compassion sees the other as completely equal. It responds by saying, “Let me walk with you,” or “Let me be with you through this journey.”

A few years ago, we talked about the difference as being. Pity serves a hungry person a meal. Compassion eats the meal with them. Two very different experiences.

At the beginning of today’s reading, the apostles are responding to the people’s needs out of pity, and it is wearing them out. Jesus invites them and us to cross over to a deeper way of living: “Be compassionate as your heavenly Father is compassionate.” Respond to people with compassion rather than pity. From compassion flows an endless source of energy.

When we consider Jesus’s lesson on compassion with St. Paul’s proclamation from the letter to the Ephesians, we have an explosive lesson. St. Paul says that in Jesus, God has broken down the walls of enmity that divide us. God has created one person out of two.

What are the walls of enmity that divide us? Republican & Democrat. United States & Mexico. Anglo, Black. Hispanic, Asian. Straight & LGBTQ+.

Vaccinated & Un-vaccinated. Muslim, Jew, Catholic, Orthodox, Hindu, Protestant, Atheist, Agnostic.

Jesus looks on the crowd and has compassion for all of them. He sees one person. A stunning revelation. God's love simply embraces everyone.

Sure there is a time to point out differences, a time to stand in opposition, and a time to take a stand for values. But, there is also a time to embrace across differences, to recognize that we can love and respect each other across differences.

Compassion eclipses our differences and makes two, one.