

## KISS THE FROG



There are many versions of the original Grimm's fairy tale called the "Frog Princess." I was shocked to learn that in the original there was no kissing involved. Rather, the frog-prince extracts a promise from a somewhat bratty princess to spend time together. Once the princess allows the frog-prince to eat with her and sleep on her pillow, his true princely nature is revealed. Go figure?! I've always heard it said that women have to kiss many frogs to find their prince. This is the reason I told my wife that if she would have kissed me sooner, she wouldn't have had to deal with so many ugly frogs before me. Her story is quite different!

But the story that most of us remember with the princess kissing the frog out of the depth of her compassion has a great lesson for us to learn. To free the prince, the princess had to let go of all she had been taught about ugliness in others. (Sound like something we need today?!) We serve our Lord Jesus who was and is in the frog kissing business. Our faith enables us to abandon all we have been taught about ugliness and unacceptability in others so that we might seek and find the "prince" in each one of them. **Jesus would call this compassion.** And the result of compassion (or "frog kissing") is actually evangelism: sharing the Gospel truth to help others.

The Scripture lessons for this coming Sunday make a connection between compassion and caring, compassion and action and compassion and teaching. **What is compassion anyway?** The dictionary defines it as "a feeling of deep sympathy for another's suffering or misfortune." If that definition is true, then many of us would consider ourselves to be compassionate. After all, it's not too difficult to have sympathy when we watch the news of such things as the condominium tragedy, or those affected by Tropical Storm Elsa or the attempted kidnaping of a small child riding her bike. But the Greek word for **compassion literally means, "moved inwardly to act outwardly."** Jesus knew, not instinctively, but compassionately, that the people are "like sheep without a shepherd" or maybe "frogs that need a kiss." This truth was like a "gut reaction" triggering Him to come to their rescue.

All three lessons for this week talk about the importance of the flock – our need as God's children to gather together and stick together and work together and move together in our mission and ministry. That's why each one of us is here on this earth. In Rev. Mark Wood's new book, "*Connected to Christ - Witnessing in Everyday Life*," (which is a MUST READ) he describes evangelism as, "broken people bringing Good News of the Healer to other broken people." (page 11) The rally cry for evangelism is simply caring for the entire world. Or you could put it this way, "Abandoning our sinful flesh that has taught us to separate from others because of one ugly reason or another and seeking to find the princely, one true Creator God-given value in all of life – in the world around us."

In Jeremiah 23:1-6, the people's problem is described as "being scattered or driven away." It's not good for the sheep to be isolated. God's solution: "I Myself will GATHER the remnant of My flock." In Ephesians 2:11-22, Paul makes the distinction between being FAR OFF and being BROUGHT NEAR. Remember, this was written by Saul, now Paul, who had begun his career as one who "scattered" the Lord's flock until the Lord Himself brought him near. Now Paul is telling others how important it is to be joined together, what we now call the "communion of saints." In Mark 6:30-44, it's almost a pun. The apostles - the word that means "to be sent out" - gathered around Jesus. For our redemption, Jesus was deprived of companionship to the point that He would cry out from the cross, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" He suffered so that we might be together as a flock. And yet, we, as the Body of Christ (the Church), resemble the world around us with only 25-30% of the flock gathered together while the rest are scattered about. The gathered flock is important - our compassionate God says so!

Compassion is normally reserved for one but Jesus had compassion for a crowd. What does Jesus see as He climbs from the boat? He sees more than a blurred conglomeration of bodies, colors and shapes or a mass of humanity. This is God and His world; the Creator and His precious creation; the Author of Life being touched to the core because those whom He loves are alone, direction-less, aim-less, lost.

Through Jesus' eyes, we see - humanity is lost. It's painful to admit our lostness. We are capable, intelligent, productive people, but we tend to live our lives in self-centeredness. Our work is all-consuming. Family worries and financial concerns dominate our thoughts. Anxiety of what's happening in the world fills our hearts and minds. Our state of lostness robs us of the very life we seek to find. Jesus saw those wandering people as lost - but we might have seen them as free to do as they please. We are so enamored by independence we might think sheep without a shepherd are the lucky ones. They can go anywhere they want, do anything they please, be with anybody they want - right?

Only the Good Shepherd can rescue. The Compassionate Shepherd came to "seek and save the lost," "to testify to the truth." His motivation is a love and concern arising from the depth of His being (compassion) - a gut reaction to extend mercy to those burdened by sin. He draws His flock near to give them rest and direction, peace and salvation.

Compassion puts a whole new value on all people (or can I be so bold as to say, "ugly frogs"). Paul makes an astounding claim: we're all part of God's house, brought together in faith. This house is built upon the Cornerstone of Christ. Can you think of anything we could ever achieve that could match that in importance? No honor more valuable, no reward we could covet more, no purpose for our lives that we could concoct that could mean more to us than to be built up by God and constructed to hold God's very own Spirit.

Compassion sees conditions rather than obligation. God is under no obligation to meet our needs. Our wants are NOT what moves Christ to compassion. It's NOT the needs that Jesus sees in the disciples, in the crowds or in us that moves Him. Rather, the compassion of Christ flows from God's eternal love, which we in no way deserve or elicit. God sees our sinful condition - and with an inward compassion that moved Him to act outwardly - God sent His Son to redeem us. Christ's compassion is directed toward an undeserving, unloving people He desires to save, rescue, redeem and claim in love.

Compassion results in action. Compassion in action is a concise description of the life of Jesus. Moved with compassion, Jesus cured diseases, fed the multitudes, gave sight to the blind, healed the lepers, and raised the dead. As great as those acts of compassion were, Jesus' ultimate act of compassion is His Cross. What good would a shepherd be to shepherd his flock through all the dangers of life only to abandon them during their gravest hour - when the debt of sin and its wages must be paid. They cannot be paid in our poverty but only with the riches of Christ's compassion - where He laid down His life for us. Our sin is forgiven, life restored, future promised and secured in Christ.

Compassion is a rallying cry to gather. (Sound like "America is coming back together"?) Our Good Shepherd lifts up His staff and calls out to us, "Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." Jeremiah uses the words, "The Lord is our Righteousness" knowing there is no greater draw than to the only One who forgives FOR LIFE! If I asked each of you this very moment what you really, really need above all else, would you know? **That's the nature of needy sheep.** A shepherd knows what his sheep need before they do. That's what made that crowd in our Gospel so blessed. Jesus had an answer to their needs before they could even ask.

Jesus teaches and feeds because He saw His flock with compassion. It was a matter of life and death. Christ guides straying sheep back to God through proclamation - revealing - teaching. We need to be shepherded by God's Word - that's what it does through the work of the Spirit. Every time we open God's Word, His Spirit desires to teach us the things of God that make a difference as a matter of life and death. We also need to be fed with the body and blood that nourishes us with the satisfying food of Christ our Righteousness, our Peace, our Fullness of Life. Jesus is not only a spiritual feeder, He is our spiritual food for which we hunger. Then and only then, are we equipped to be apostles sent out for the purpose of gathering the lost into His flock.

As Jesus went through the towns and villages, HIS EYES didn't come across one person He didn't want to teach and feed with the life and death urgency of salvation found only in Him - their one true Shepherd.

Because of Jesus, we are a satisfied flock. What? You're not satisfied completely? If it weren't for Jesus' perfect life, atoning death, and victorious resurrection, God's justice would not be

satisfied and your daily life could only be best defined by death and the truth that there is nothing better in store for you - only condemnation. God desires that we find our complete satisfaction in Him. Why? If you find yourself saying, "The things I receive in worship are nice, but for me to be really satisfied, I need far more," then your life will be characterized as a "sheep without a shepherd." You will be led every which way hungering for that which will never satisfy because "things" will never be enough. And yet, in our sinfulness, when we think we have it all, we have settled for far less than what God desires for us to have that truly satisfies.

There is no other truth on which we can rely. No other Shepherd who can give us life. No other Savior who overcomes sin and death. Only One. And He is present always and forever for you. And that makes a difference in everything we do. That we have a place to stand and a truth that will not change or let us down - ever! Because of Jesus, we are also a satisfying flock. Satisfied sheep are satisfying sheep. Or I suggest in this article - kissed frogs are princes. The leftovers of God's providence are more than enough to meet the world's needs. His compassion, providence and abundance never run out. We cannot be about the task of "frog kissing" if we're not satisfied with what God has lavished upon us in Christ - if you are not someone who has been changed from dead in sin to alive in Christ, changed from condemned sinner to resurrected saint. Your life has been changed by the Healer who has healed your brokenness. He didn't change you magically with a kiss but with His life, death and resurrection.

Are you satisfied? As the satisfied, we profoundly understand that what we have is a matter of life and death to meet the needs of a scattered flock that isn't quite sure what it's hungry for. We can be bold to share because, after all, there are plenty of leftovers. And the green pastures and sweet, still ponds of water are yours. Satisfied sheep are satisfying sheep. Kissed frogs are kissing princes. By grace, we know that our lives have been changed now and for eternity.

**What's that? You would never kiss an ugly frog?** That's exactly what many people say about evangelism - the desire to help a dying world through the life found in Christ alone. As you hear the lessons on Sunday, you may ask yourself, "How did that writer in the English District newsletter come up with kissing a frog when the lessons talk about sheep and a shepherd? (My wife asked that question too!) Well...because I would really be reluctant to kiss a frog **unless** I really knew I could make a difference for the frog. Isn't that what we think when it comes to evangelism as well? Can little ol' me really change the world around me? It begins with us. Will you kiss the frog? What if you could really let go of all the bias, all the judgement, and any and all prejudice - and see the entire world as God sees it - precious, lost, as sheep without a shepherd - moved inwardly to act outwardly? What would you be? A witness for Christ, the Good Shepherd, the Healer, the One who embraces us with His mercy and grace for salvation (or maybe even a frog kisser).

I encourage you to consider purchasing the book from CPH, "*Connected to Christ - Witnessing in Everyday Life*." Reverend Mark Wood discusses the joy and privilege of serving as a witness for Christ. And he describes evangelism as much more desirable than kissing a frog.

Accompanied by the Holy Spirit, witnessing is the privilege of making a difference in the world for eternity - one broken soul at a time by one broken, redeemed soul. Witnessing literally brings out the “prince” God wills for all His sheep - to gather to Himself His precious flock - which includes every person we lay eyes on.

Kiss an ugly frog? You bet!! If it will really make that kind of difference. At the English District, we would love to hear your experiences with sharing the Gospel. Drop us a note at this email: [evangelizationteam@englishdistrict.org](mailto:evangelizationteam@englishdistrict.org) We look forward to hearing from you. And the next “frog” you see (yes, even that person!), with compassion pucker up and joyously share the Good News of Jesus. It won’t be that bad. I promise!! But more importantly, God does!

In Christ Alone,  
Pastor John Diener  
Galatians 2:20