

## **Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family**

### **Title: The Gift of Presence**

### **Lesson: Mark 6:30-34, 53-56**

*<sup>30</sup> The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. <sup>31</sup> Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." <sup>32</sup> So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. <sup>33</sup> But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. <sup>34</sup> When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things. <sup>53</sup> When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. <sup>54</sup> As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. <sup>55</sup> They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. <sup>56</sup> And wherever he went—into villages, towns or countryside—they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.*

At some point, I became afraid of having someone, especially our family from Korea, stay at our house. This is because, before they come, I feel excited and thrilled, but after they leave, I find traces of their presence throughout our home, which makes me feel their absence, emptiness, and sadness.

We tend to recognize existence through absence, at least I do. When we are with someone, it is not easy to feel the value and gratitude for their presence. And only when that presence leaves us do we realize their existence, recognize that their presence was a gift, and feel complex emotions like regret for not treating them better, emptiness, and sadness.

Before my sister-in-law and niece came here, we were busy preparing to welcome them and excited to see them. At the end of June, they arrived here, and my wife and I were very happy to see her sister, whom we hadn't seen for years, and our niece, whom we were meeting in person for the first time after only seeing her through video calls for a long time. It was a joyful time. While being with them, time seemed to pass slowly, but suddenly it went by quickly, and the day before their departure came.

They were scheduled to leave for Korea on Thursday morning, and since

there was quite a distance from our house to the airport, we were wondering what to do. Thankfully, a friend of my wife who lives in Minneapolis allowed us to stay for a night at her grandmother in law's temporarily vacant house.

Everything went smoothly on the day they left. We arrived at the airport on time, they checked in, and we said our goodbyes at security. Then we returned to our parked car. The car still had traces of them. When we saw the trunk, which had been filled with their luggage, now empty, we realized they had left. My niece often cried in the car, and not hearing her crying anymore made us recognize their absence.

Although there were many happy and good moments while being with them, I drove a lot taking them to various places, looked after the kids, and constantly did housework, so I often felt tired. Therefore, I didn't think I would feel sad after they left.

However, after returning home, my son went into the room where they stayed and called their names into the air. The three of us sat on the couch, and it felt a bit strange.

From the next morning, we felt their absence more strongly. Every morning, my sister-in-law played music on her phone while having breakfast with her daughter and our son and spent time on the porch and yard in front of the house. But the morning after they left, there was no music in the house, making us realize they had gone. For lunch that day, we cooked their favorite dish, and as we ate, I started to tear up. We felt their absence through the items they left behind and the drawings we made together. Only then did we realize the value and gratitude of their presence and time spent together, recognizing that they were a gift to us.

Friends, I believe that presence is a gift. There is a poem in Korea that says: "A person's coming is, in fact, a tremendous thing. This is because they come along with their past, their present, and their future. It is because a person's entire life is arriving." If you have been hesitant to express your gratitude, love, or apologies to your close ones, why not express your heart today? The presence of your loved ones is a gift.

Jesus' presence is also a gift to us. Today's story explains who Jesus is and

why He came to us. Jesus had compassion on us who were like sheep without a shepherd because He was full of love.

Jesus taught a large crowd in a solitary place, and soon it was evening. The large crowd gathered there was hungry, but there was not enough food, and the disciples did not have enough money to feed everyone. There were only five loaves of bread and two fish. However, Jesus took the food, prayed over it, broke it, and gave it to His disciples to distribute to the people. Then, something scientifically inexplicable happened. Everyone there ate and was satisfied, and they collected twelve baskets of leftovers.

Friends, how could this be? It is because Jesus came to us as the bread of life. Because Jesus came as the bread of life, He could satisfy our hunger and quench our thirst.

After feeding the 5,000, Jesus sent His disciples ahead to Bethsaida and dismissed the crowd. Then He went up on a mountain to pray. After dusk, the disciples' boat was in the middle of the lake, and they were straining at the oars because of the wind. Jesus walked on the water to them, intending to pass by them. When they saw Him walking on the water, they thought He was a ghost and were terrified. But Jesus spoke to them, reassuring them of who He was. This reminds us that Jesus not only satisfies our hunger and thirst but also calms our fears, anxieties, and worries.

However, verse 52 says: "for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened."

Despite Jesus performing many miracles and showing many signs while with His disciples, they did not understand who He was. Why didn't they recognize Jesus?

I think it was because Jesus was always with them. In other words, they did not recognize Jesus' presence because they had not experienced His absence.

Some might ask why Jesus had to die. Why, if He is the Son of God, did the Almighty God have to die? Couldn't He save us without dying? The common answer is that a sacrifice was needed to forgive sins, and Jesus became that sacrifice for us.

Reflecting on my recent experience with my sister-in-law and niece's

presence and absence, I had a thought about Jesus' death and resurrection. We tend to recognize existence through absence, and Jesus' death made us feel His absence, which allowed us to understand who He truly is.

Even though Jesus performed many miracles while with His disciples, they did not understand who He was. It was only after Jesus died on the cross, and His body was placed in the tomb, that the disciples felt His absence. And through experiencing Jesus' resurrection, they recognized His presence and came to truly believe in Him.

Just like the poem I shared earlier, Jesus' presence and life came to us like a gift and transformed our lives completely.

Nothing is more important in our lives than the presence of Jesus, but all the people we meet are also precious children of God and valuable beings. While we still have the chance to be with them, say you love them, thank them, and apologize to them, don't miss the opportunity to love them because our time is limited, and it doesn't wait for us. Thank you, Lord, for always giving us good things and good opportunities. Amen.