

Prioritize for Ministry
July 19, 2009 – Lectionary 16
Rev. Paul Johns

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

It was called a Service of Thanksgiving and Prayer for the life of Don Boeing. It took place one week ago Thursday evening with over 800 in attendance. Don was known for a lot of things, but especially for his love of and commitment to high school youth.

The guest preacher was a man by the name of Harry Thiel, age 80. When he came to Don's parish he was right out of the seminary at age 24. Don was 14 and said, "I would like to talk with you about high school youth." "Alright, let's schedule an event," and they did with 16 present, more than ever previously. So they scheduled another event. This time they had 35 show up, but no way to transport them. Pastor Thiel talked with the mayor. "Why, yes, I guess you could use one of the city trucks."

Time slipped away from them. "There is only one way we can get the kids home on time." It was the early 50s – "Let's just go right through O'Hare." A police car came out with lights flashing. "What are you doing?" "*We're trying to get some kids home on time.*" "Who are you?" "*A church group.*" "Well, I'm going to talk with your pastor." "*I am the pastor.*" "Of what church?" "*Of Wesley Methodist.*"

Pastor Thiel paused and said, "O God, I again ask for forgiveness for that dishonesty, but I was so passionate about getting those kids home on time." Of course, we are not Wesley Methodist.

One of the most prominent researchers of our day is George Barna. What is a major difference between churches that are growing and those that are not? The answer that appears over and over is passion. We really care about this ministry. We believe people; coming to a life-giving relationship with God through Christ is the most important thing in the world.

Our Gospel says that Jesus had heartfelt compassion on the people because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

This leads us to a second priority for ministry. First of all, have passion. Secondly, have purpose.

Early in the tenure of President John Kennedy he said, "before this generation passes, we will land a man on the moon." It happened in July 1969. I will never forget it. I was in, of all places, one of the strongest Communist countries, Bulgaria. I remember two people in the restaurant coming up to me and saying, "Your cosmonauts have landed on the moon."

Apollo 11 is a story of success because people had a goal and set out to reach it. There was a sense of purpose. With Jesus in our Gospel that sense of purpose was to teach the people so that they would be like sheep with a shepherd. As the apostle Paul says in our second reading, "You are members of the household of God with Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone.

Priority for ministry number one – have passion. Number two – have a sense of purpose. Now it is almost as if Jesus gets starkly practical about priorities for taking care of yourself. First of all, take some time for good eating. Nourish the body and the soul with bread and with the Bread of Life.

I heard it on the news this week. People, especially children in America, are getting heavier. But 11% have hunger anxieties. Right after our Gospel for today there is the story of the feeding of the multitudes. What shall we do with these people? And Jesus says, "Feed them."

One of my favorite books is entitled *Katherina von Bora*. One of the things she as the wife of Martin Luther stressed to Luther was, "Eat well; rest well."

A touching story that appeared this past week was the story of the cuddler. Steve Kubiczjy volunteers with others to give babies needed cuddling. It is a healing ministry like the healing ministry of Jesus at the end of our Gospel for today.

That ministry of Jesus needs passion...needs purpose... and needs personal care. And people then and people now were and are healed. Amen.