

Lyn Valley Mission Community

Trinity 7

Jeremiah 23:1-6

Psalm 23

Ephesians 2:11-end

Mark 6: 30-34,53-end

In speaking and listening, writing and reading, may God be known, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

It is the lovely reflection of Jesus' inner thoughts in the midst of today's gospel:

He had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things

that has inspired the choice of most of the other readings from the lectionary for this Sunday: Psalm 23 "The Lord is my Shepherd" and a passage from Jeremiah 23: 1-6 in which God promised to set his own good shepherd in the midst of the people of God (if you are reading or listening to this at home you might like to read this passage)

In the passage from Jeremiah God talks of drawing people back to Godself, gathering them into a flock in which they need no longer be afraid, dismayed or missing. There is an image of renewed wellbeing that God desires to establish.

We see something like that enacted in the gospel passages, which come from either side of the story of the feeding of five thousand men. That story is perhaps more familiar than these passages which frame it, but we have a lot going on in the few verses we have heard today.

The main theme is that people want to be where Jesus is.

Jesus is trying to give his apostles, those sent out to share in his mission, a time of rest, but the crowds so want to be with them that they are prepared to anticipate the rout of their boat trip and run round to meet them as they get there.

What is first on offer is Jesus' teaching. Here Mark does not give any examples but we can imagine the storytelling of Jesus' parables, asking people to see for themselves how God is at work for them, captivating those who had made such an effort to be with him.

In the later part of the reading we are given another vignette: whenever people knew Jesus was in a place they rushed around to gather the most vulnerable and needy members of the community to help them come into contact with him.

"they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing says the Lord"

What I think is really interesting here is that, whereas in the first part of the reading we see people being attracted themselves to be close to Jesus, in this second part people are bringing those who cannot come under their own effort, but want to be where Jesus is in the hope of experiencing the healing he is known for.

This is what it looks like when God gathers the flock, when God's shepherd is present:

People are attracted to come close, and confident to draw others closer for God to meet them in their need.

Attraction draws them to gather and meet Jesus, and meeting him, find his guidance and his healing.

The presence of God's compassionate shepherd is attractive.

Mark has offered us a picture of Jesus present in first century Galilee drawing the crowds who receive his compassion and his healing as they encounter him.

I am struck though, by how much of the imagery and landscape of the story has resonances with the 21<sup>st</sup> century Lyn Valley.

Here we are in the midst of the holiday season – surrounded by those who have "come away" to rest; those serving them are busy, busier than ever it seems, so they certainly will recognise the apostles' state of not having the leisure to eat. We are of course, surrounded by farms – shepherds amongst us now well into the

shearing season. And frankly, across our nation I am sure the yearning for healing – whether physical, emotional, mental or spiritual – is great.

God promised a shepherd amongst us, and the Christian faith has understood that is fulfilled in the incarnation – Jesus, who commissions those who worship him, to be his continued bodily presence in the world, empowered by his Spirit. We are his hands, and feet, his eyes and heart. The church is commissioned as a means by which the presence of God is visible in the world.

The language of shepherding is woven through church life. Sometimes we are better at following Jesus' version of being a shepherd than others – but as we reflect on our call to serve the world we find ourselves in today, the pattern of today's gospel, in which it is compassion, attraction, and the hope of needs met that gathers the flock to Jesus may offer us guidance.

What needs to shine through in our life together is the attraction of Jesus.

How do we let go of what obscures that attraction within our life together, and as we live out a calling to show God's visible presence in the world?

It is likely that over the next weeks we will be re-opening our buildings for private prayer – how do they communicate compassion, how might they be places of feeling safe, creating space for seeking healing from a difficult few months?

In our conversations, how do we draw others towards even the fringe of Jesus' garment, the healing presence of God in our own lives?

I often throw out questions to ponder, and I know some people would like some suggestions of answers too, so:

How do we let the attraction of God work in our common life?

First, by being clear for ourselves what is the attraction of Jesus for us, what of Jesus we want to show to the world, what is our gift in bring his presence to visibility around us?

Second, by viewing our world with the compassion of Jesus, and letting that compassion guide our actions.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, by turning to God with our own needs, being that person willing to run round to the other side of the lake to meet him, or letting our neighbour carry us to him when we are not strong enough to get there ourselves.

Jesus, our Good Shepherd,

So fill us with your compassion that we may be those who attract others to discover that in your company we need no longer fear, be dismayed or feel missing, that we may be those through whom you minister your healing and peace in the days before us, Amen