

## **Sunday, July 18<sup>th</sup>. 2021 Trinity 7**

### **Jeremiah 23. 1-6, Psalm 23, Mark 6. 30-34, 53-56**

In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

In the road where we first lived in Brighthouse, there was a man, who had a large garden, and whose job it was to make floral displays for weddings and funerals. When I told him that I was going into teaching, he said, "You want to get a proper job!" I presume that meant a job where you work with your hands. Some people used to say that teaching was a nine to four job with long holidays. Of course, it is not! Apart from teaching different groups all day and spending a lot of energy doing it, you have to spend much extra time preparing material, marking pupils' work, attending meetings and sometimes going on training courses. By the end of term, you are pretty tired and need a rest.

In today's Gospel, the twelve have just returned for their first mission, where they have been teaching and healing. They are excited about their experience, but they also need a rest. They need time to be with Jesus to report back, and also in order that they can be trained further.

But the crowds follow them wherever they go. Jesus then sends them off in a boat, but even then, the crowds catch up with them.

Even though Jesus needs to spend time with the disciples, he sees that the people in the crowd are like sheep without a shepherd. The shepherd is there to protect the flock, but also to lead them to new pasture. The people need leadership.

In the passage from Jeremiah, there is the promise of a new king, who would secure peace and prosperity for his people, a good life under the ideal king, a shepherd, who would exercise leadership.

Psalm 23 is a song of confidence in God as shepherd of his people. It shows a pilgrim on his way to the temple in Jerusalem on a long and arduous journey. He sees God as shepherd, guide and protector. If the way leads through a steep and dangerous place (valley of the shadow of death), the sheep fears neither pitfalls nor enemies, as God the shepherd is there to defend him. Finally, God becomes the host, providing for his guests with lavish generosity (my cup will be full), and the pilgrim realises that he will live in the protecting presence of God for the rest of his life and for evermore.

In the Gospel, some verses are left out – the feeding of the five thousand and Jesus walking on the water. In both cases, the disciples fail

to understand the deeper meaning of these events, and Mark is critical of them.

Jesus needs to hear how they have got on during their mission and also to give them further training to explain things, which they haven't fully understood, possibly also to teach them about being shepherds, as he himself has been. In addition to this, they need to be given time to have a breather and to spend time with God, as he also needs to do. It is interesting that we are told on some occasions, that Jesus explained the parables to people as far as they could take it, but privately to his disciples, he explained everything. It's a bit like learning a subject in school to a certain level, but then those, who wish to take it further, go on to university to study it more deeply.

However, it has all become very busy, and Jesus has compassion for the people and tries to meet their needs. No wonder that they all need a break!

Many jobs these days are busy, and there is much pressure on many people, especially with having to meet targets, take part in appraisals and be available at the end of a mobile phone all the time. We can't give of our best unless we have some space to spend time together with other people, do something different for a while and recharge our batteries.

Today, there are people with many needs, people, who need feeding and healing, people, who need help to refocus. We are called to be shepherds, and we can become very busy in our churches with the various groups and activities. But we need time to pray and to listen to God and to each other, to share experience and sometimes to take part in a course, as we often do in Lent to help us to grow in faith.

Now it is July 18<sup>th</sup>. and the holidays beckon. After all that has happened during the last eighteen months, many of us simply need a rest, so that we can come back in the autumn renewed and refreshed to take up our call to be shepherds and exercise the leadership, which God is asking of us.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.