

St Marc Grenoble

Sunday 18th July 2021(Trinity 7)

Ephesians 2: 11 - 22

Psalm 23

Mark 6: 30 - 44

'Sheep without a Shepherd'

Good morning, welcome to all of you here, and those of you joining us on Zoom. **Let's PRAY.**

The whole chapter of Mark's Gospel, chapter 6, is full of exciting stories, reporting Jesus' grace and power and affirming Him as Messiah.

This morning's reading recounts the first of two 'Epiphany' events (or revelations), which clearly affirm who Jesus is.

But, first Mark tells us about the apostles reporting back to Jesus.

Earlier in the chapter, (in 6: 7 – 12), we were told that Jesus had sent out the disciples in pairs; He gave them authority over evil spirits, and instructions to travel light. – Now, they returned, after an amazing experience, and couldn't wait to tell Him all about it.

This is the first time Mark refers to them as 'apostles' – the word comes from the original verb 'to send', so apostles are - 'those who are sent'. Apostles is a term traditionally used for the earliest Christian missionaries.

When the disciples did what Jesus commissioned them to do, they were amazed at how the Holy Spirit worked through them; and how many people repented – changed the direction of their lives – when they heard the Gospel; and were healed from their diseases and freed from the evil spirits, which had taken control of their lives.

It's remarkable how God was able to use that bunch of ordinary people, with very mixed backgrounds and dubious track records – people just like you and me, to bring Good News to folk who desperately needed it.

The Holy Spirit empowered those very ordinary folk to bring people into His Kingdom, in a big way. They preached the Good News, cast out demons, anointed people with oil, and healed them.

The first verses in today's Gospel reading tell us what happened when they came to report back to Jesus; they were amazed at how He had used them, imperfect as they were.

Can you imagine the scene? We're told, they "gathered round Jesus and reported to Him all they had done and taught."

Somehow, I don't think it was a quiet, orderly gathering – rather, I suspect an excited, noisy bunch of friends who simply couldn't wait to share their news with Jesus, their leader and closest friend.

Jesus instantly picked-up on their excitement, but things around Him were, as always, busy – He attracted enormous crowds wherever He went – so He said to them: 'Come with me by yourselves; we'll find somewhere lonely and private - a quiet place to rest and be refreshed'. And they set off by boat, to 'a remote place'.

Jesus wanted them to have rest, refreshment and time to be in quiet fellowship with Him. They needed that, and I'm sure Jesus needed it too.

But, the relentless crowds would simply not leave them alone – the land around the North shore of the Sea of Galilee, is relatively flat, but higher than the level of the lake, so it was very easy to see where the boat was going.

– The crowds could see where they were heading, and rushed on ahead to meet them

When they arrived in the boat, tired as He was, we're told "Jesus was deeply sorry for the crowds, because they were like 'a flock without a shepherd'. So He started teaching them many things." This went on for many hours.

But, having taught them, Jesus realised they needed feeding – His concern reinforces the shepherd image - caring for the needs of His sheep.

Mark was sending clear signals, when he used this 'sheep and shepherd language' his early readers would have immediately understood the message – they knew their scripture by heart. - only a few people could read, so they memorised large parts of the scriptures verbally!

This passage has strong echoes of the Old Testament. We read in Numbers 27: 17 that Moses prayed:

"May the LORD, the God of the spirits of all mankind, appoint a man over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will

lead them out and bring them in, so the LORD's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd."

And, in Ezekiel 34, there's a long passage about how the people of Israel were like sheep without a shepherd. In verses 15 & 16 God says:

I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.

Mark was affirming Jesus is the shepherd God promised – in other words - the Messiah.

Looking back, it's quite easy for us to understand these signs; but, it seems the disciples at the time were struggling to understand what Jesus was doing – all they saw was a huge logistical problem.

Jesus saw an opportunity to trust the Father and to glorify His name.

He had the people sit down, or recline, in groups on the green grass, looked up to heaven, and gave thanks for the food. The miracle took place right there in Jesus' hands.

Here again is Old Testament imagery, listen to the 23rd Psalm:

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures,
He leads me beside quiet waters.

Jesus fed more than 5,000 people (5,000 men - plus families?), using one lad's packed lunch as the basis for His big picnic - everyone ate bread and fish until they were full to overflowing, and twelve** baskets were filled with the crumbs and leftovers collected up afterwards. No one went hungry

Jesus' gifts are never sparse they always fill us until 'our cup runneth over'

This miracle was intended as a clear revelation of Jesus - the 'shepherd of the people' promised by God throughout the Old Testament.

Most of the folk in the crowd were amazed at the miracles, appreciated the gift, in this case food to satisfy their hunger – but didn't get the message.

Even today, with the benefit of hindsight, many people clearly see the signs, they're impressed, they want the gifts Jesus offers, but are often not prepared to take the risk of inviting Him into their lives.

Jesus calls and commissions us, as apostles, to take the Good News to the people around us.

Every one of us is called to some kind of ministry for Jesus – that's the nature of our faith – our commission is to share the Good News of Jesus, often in very caring, loving and practical ways.

But, the other side of that is every one of us needs to be personally refreshed and encouraged by Jesus – but we forget it all too often!

We need to make time, every day, to read His word, listen to His voice and spend time worshipping and fellowshiping with Him.

I used to have a wonderful electric screwdriver, it was remarkably powerful and made jobs around the house much easier. But, if I forgot to leave it on charge when I wasn't using it, it was absolutely useless ... It needed power.

We're all just the same as that screwdriver – we can be powerful tools for the Gospel, when we are empowered by the Holy Spirit. But, if we fail to spend time, daily, being re-charged, we are absolutely useless.

We need to find out exactly what Jesus wants us to do for Him; and we need to receive power from the Holy Spirit to do the task.

So, starting this week, make time to read some verses of scripture every day and spend some quiet moments worshipping and listening to God.

Then you'll be refreshed and find new power in your faith ...

Let's Pray