

Jeremiah 23.1-16; Ps 23; Ephesians 2.11-22; Mark 6.30-34,53-56

There is such a lot going on at the moment – schools are preparing to break up for the summer – people are exhausted, teachers are absolutely shattered. St Peter's have two year groups sent home – parents are struggling to deal with the fall out – people don't know what to do about holidays – and when they do they can't get anything booked now – the season of normality is no more ...

Last weekend there were nearly capacity crowds at Wimbledon and Euro finals – not many masks – churches have stayed socially distanced – masks and no singing – some will want to continue beyond tomorrow – some won't – we need to take care of us all and work towards making this a place of welcome wherever you fit on the level of easing.

Tomorrow is the day - we are being told that legal restrictions are being lifted – to brave the increase in cases as this has been factored in but it will level off – people need to take responsibility and be cautious – but some will and some won't – it's all bewildering and confusing – and we're tired...

So – what would Jesus do? How would he have reacted to the pandemic?

Jesus had compassion on them – and he said 'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while'

Doesn't that sound appealing?

In the Gospel story we will hear shortly – and all the readings are on the news sheet - Jesus says just that to his disciples– not to the crowd, the community – but to his close followers whom he is teaching and nurturing for a purpose of living out God's love when he is no longer here – they don't know that yet...

But it is so busy – why rest a while when there is so much to do they might be asking – just like we do I suspect...?

But Jesus knew that by resting a while – to pray and ponder, the time that is spent in the doing is energised and infused with God's grace and energy and inspiration and creativity – to the degree that we tap into it– he knew that more long-lasting and transforming 'doing' is possible with God's help than going it alone – not being connected to God's energising and mobilising spirit

Jesus knew that and he was showing the disciples what it was like to live a spiritual life in its fullest – head in the clouds and feet on the ground – inner connection and outer expression.

Imagine being a close follower of Jesus back then – with him by your side, living with him in daily life – But Jesus was on a mission – I imagine they would have been flat out from here to there and trying to keep one step ahead of the game where the authorities were concerned who were beginning to sense Jesus was going to be trouble.

But Jesus has compassion on the disciples now – they are tired and exhausted – and so was he most likely. They needed some quiet time.

So let's hear the Gospel story now – from the perspective of one of the disciples – I wonder who? Try and go to the shoreline of Galilee in your mind – close your eyes if you want – imagine you are one of the apostles – you might know who you would like to be – but either way, imagine you are there – tired out – and picture yourself living the story;

'We had had a fantastic time telling people all the things Jesus had been teaching us. We had also been able to heal people, and the buzz of excitement about what was happening got better and better. You can imagine the noise when we got back to where Jesus was – all of us trying to tell him our bit of news, trying to get his approval and find out what had been happening to the others! And, at the same time, other people were arriving, asking to see him. And he was talking to them and healing them as well. It was...well, it was chaos – and we never even got round to preparing anything to eat!

'Fortunately, Jesus realised what was going on. And seeing how exhausted we all were, he suggested we got away from it all, and have some time to get our breath back. We thought we had managed to slip away by boat, across the lake. But somehow people had spotted us, and ran round to the other side. They beat us to it. By the time we got to shore, there was already a crowd waiting. My heart sank. We needed some peace and quiet. But Jesus quoted that verse from the Book of Numbers to us: "They are just like sheep running about without a shepherd," and he just got on with teaching them – right up until it was too dark to see any more.

'The same thing happened when we got into the boat and went to Gennesaret. There was the crowd, waiting on the shore. Everywhere we went – towns, villages, out to the countryside – it was always the same. People begging him to heal their friends, their family – whoever they had brought. Some just asked if they could touch his cloak. And even they got better. It was a most exhausting time...but I wouldn't have missed it for the world.' (music)

I wouldn't have missed being in the presence of Jesus...

The crowd that waits for them are the crowd whom Jesus has compassion for – and feeds – all 5000 of them....

But we don't focus on that today – we are holding the compassion of God – expressed through Jesus and his spirit within us encouraging us to tap into that compassion – that love – and that care God has for us and gives us through being reminded in stories like this – and through tapping into the spirit of love and compassion deep within us as we go to quiet places with Jesus on our hearts...

People have been seeking a shepherd to pastor them and lead them – from way back – Jeremiah speaks about the ideal shepherd leadership – against his safekeeping as it happens when he is put in prison and sent to the stocks for his deriding the corrupt leaders

And David speaks about that great shepherd love and mercy of our Lord – affirming that we will not want – we will be led to green pasture and still waters – for the sake of goodness

And David then turns the psalm around and it becomes his own conversation with God – though I walk through the valley of death – you are there with ME – you will comfort ME with your rod and staff – you will anoint MY head with oil and mercy and goodness will be with ME all the days of my life – and that is a forever life ...

Today we are reminded that we are not alone in all this – in all that we try to do in our lives – in our work – in our homes – in our church – in our community – we are not alone. God IS with us and reading these passages of scripture and taking them into our hearts as we find our quiet places will illuminate them and make them so in our hearts which will bring us peace in troubled waters – and will energise the things we do with God's grace and inspiration –

Jesus had compassion on his followers – on the bewildered crowds who were yet to know him – regardless of whether they behaved or not – and he has compassion on us today – he is our good shepherd – and knows us by name and shows us how to lead – and how to follow. Sheep and shepherds – known by name and known by love.

Resting not rushing – pausing to pray – bringing God's peace into our hearts – and walking with Jesus as we walk our sometimes unknown and confusing pathways of life – a confident and hopeful message for us all to take away – and act upon – five minutes here and five minutes there – every little helps...

Jesus says – 'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while' Amen

And let's just rest for a few moments to open to God's reassuring and restful peace.

Then we say our prayer together