

Proper 11 - 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity - July 18<sup>th</sup> 2021

Jer 23:1-6; **Psalm 23**; **Eph 2:11-end**; **Mark 6:30-34 and 53-end**

I do not think it a co-incidence that the Psalm for today is 23, which most of us know and can recite, or sing at least some of, if we were asked. No, I'm not going to ask you! However, it was a timely coincidence that I spent four days this week at The Greenhouse, a Christian Retreat House in Poole, Dorset which neatly aligns with today's Gospel. But first, St. Paul's words of transformation and hope:

*'Never forget that once you were...heathen.... but now you... belong to Christ. St Paul painted a picture of unity and peace because Jews and Gentiles no longer needed to take sides - they had become one, fused together with Jesus as their Cornerstone. Verse 16: As parts of the same body, our anger against each other has disappeared, for both of us have been reconciled to God. And so, the feud ended at last at the cross.*

The God for whom Moses had to cover his face when he went up the mountain, has come near through Jesus' death and resurrection, forever changing how we relate to each other individually and as nations. We may say, that was how Paul expressed his understanding of the Good News then but, in the generations since, this message feels like it needs to be heard and believed once more. I wonder, do we want

to retrieve and live that wonderful message of unity and peace with Jesus as the Cornerstone of our lives?

You may be shaking your inner heads saying this is only wishful thinking. If you are, then this is something St. Paul would ask us, as a Church, to be sorry for and here's why...

I read a post last Friday, written by a man struggling with prayer. He'd started to question if God was listening at all: *'The reason why I struggled wasn't because God was inconsistent in His Love for me, but because I wasn't able to receive His Love. So, I started working on my ability to receive His love.... I grew from a place struggling to connect to God and His Love to a place where I am now daily able to encounter God's love.'*

The man started to let God love him by letting go of his resistance to become a child of God, resting in his Heavenly Father's loving arms. Having heard today's Gospel, you'll know this is both challenging because we are asked to put God first; not second, and certainly not further down the list, but also simple because we don't need to do anything except let God love us. Let's go back to Mark's Gospel to find out how.

Jesus had sent the disciples out to heal and renew people's lives. They returned with eager stories and hopeful hearts. Jesus had been resting in his Father's love as he awaited their return. Gathered together

again, Jesus said, *'Let's get away from the crowds for a while and rest'*. Jesus offered three invitations in saying this. Firstly, he prepared the disciples for the exhaustion of such work, for which the disciples needed self-awareness. Secondly, Jesus provided space, away from the crowds, for them to be loved and restored, and thirdly, to remind them to eat, both physically and spiritually.

The picture Mark portrays is that the crowds were pressing in. What he did not tell us was how big the Sea of Galilee was and that once you sailed from shore you could be on the water for two or more hours, depending on which way the wind was blowing or if wild weather was brewing. Mark was also at pains to let his readers know that, as the icon revealed, we are all *'like sheep without a shepherd'* unless we draw close to Jesus on a regular basis.

I'm sure you've heard of the phrase *'retreat to advance'*. A youth minister, whose diary was beginning to overwhelm him, was feeling pressed into doing more and more. *'The reality was that my work stopped me properly connecting with God. In my quiet times, my prayers became more about getting through the day rather than spending time as a child in my Father's presence. I needed to take a day on retreat, to get away, to pray and listen to God.'* This reconnection changed the Youth Minister's thinking. He remembered, *'we are human beings not human doings*

*and our primary role is seeking our relationship with God.'*

So, here are five reasons to consider taking Jesus's words to heart: *Let's get away from the crowds for a while and rest'*:

- 1] It stops us thinking we are the solution to everyone's problems
- 2] It reconnects us with our Heavenly Father on deeper levels
- 3] It restores a Godly perspective
- 4] It builds confidence, confirming what God calls us to do
- 5] retreating is imitating Jesus' example!

Here is a picture of a boat on the sea of Galilee: take one minute of quiet reflection on these five reasons and the Gospel's words. A prayer as you do this: *Blessed are You, Heavenly God, Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; send your Holy Spirit to speak to our hearts this morning, in Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.*



*Never forget that once you were... struggling...but now you are... a child of God. Retreat to advance by stopping at still waters and in green pastures. Amen.*

<https://www.thriveym.org.uk/need-retreat-advance/>

<https://www.the-greenhouse.org/>

<https://www.retreats.org.uk/>