

Thought for the Day Mark 6.30-34, 53-56

How many of us have had busy week? It sometimes feels like we have been rushing around continually with no time to think or breathe for over a year now. Many people who are working have said they are busier than ever. Those who have caring responsibilities have had to do more and more as access to services were restricted by the pandemic. A lot of people feel exhausted. Not just tired but drained. Worry and isolation are also exhausting, so those who haven't seen family, or have no family are equally worn out. And, of course we are in this for the long haul. Restrictions may ease but the virus will not "go away", we need to adjust our lives to live with it and maybe we need to stop and rest for a while.

In our Gospel reading from Mark, the twelve apostles come back to Jesus after being sent out to teach and heal. They gather round him and are bursting to tell him all that they had done. Jesus listens but also looks and notices that they are exhausted. They haven't even had time to stop and eat.

This passage really gives a sense of urgency to the gospel and we can picture the scene of Jesus and his followers clamouring around him, eager to show him they had done what was asked of them. Jesus suggests they go out in the boat again and find a place to be quiet, somewhere to recharge their batteries ready for the next challenge. He realises that his apostles can't continue at a frenetic pace for ever, or they will be at risk of "burnout".

But, things do not go according to plan. They are recognised by the some people who set off on foot and arrive ahead of them, spreading the word as they go. By the time Jesus gets out of the boat he is engulfed by a crowd. He doesn't get cross or refuse to get out of the boat, or ask for it to be steered in another direction. He realises that they are rudderless, they are described as being like sheep without a shepherd. The people of God have been weakened and scattered. The prophecies of Moses and Ezekiel have come true, the people of God have been weakened and scattered by oppressive rulers who care more for themselves and their rich friends than they do for their people. Herod has just thrown a big party for his birthday at which he has the herald of God's coming kingdom killed, John the Baptist. So it is no wonder that they are seeking something more, a true leader, or perhaps more accurately a leader of what is true.

Just as the shepherd in those times would lead his sheep from the front, Jesus leads the people to the truth. He stays with them and teaches them. His apostles do not complain that they are tired, Jesus doesn't send the crowds away. They spend time with them, giving each one of them a sense of personal value and worth.

The cycle repeats when they land at Gennesarat. As soon as the boat is moored people start to come to Him. Wherever Jesus and the Apostles go people flock to them. Jesus heals the sick, and pays attention to the poor in every town and village. Crucially He does this in the market place. The economic and political hub of the community. The place where legal hearings, elections, and debates take place, in addition to the buying and selling of goods. Jesus the shepherd tends his flock in plain sight of rulers and politicians. He sends the clear message that God's kingdom welcomes the poor, the sick, the outcast.

This message is as strong today as it was when Jesus taught the crowds. It is God's message to us. Yes we may be tired, worn down, anxious, afraid but Jesus will lead us if we let Him. He will calm our fears, salve our wounds, nourish our souls and help us face the challenges ahead. Amen