

**8th Sunday after Trinity 2024**  
**Little Langford**  
**Stapleford**

**Jeremiah 23:1-6**  
**Ephesians 2: 11-22**  
**Mark 6: 30-34, 53-56**

Sheep without a shepherd

- We live in a world where people are harassed and afraid much like people in Biblical times. Each day brings its own pressures and worries and there are times when many people don't know what to do for the best. No doubt you feel this way at times. It is then, as well as at easier times, that we need to stop, take stock and pray. We are all called upon at different times to help others in a variety of situations. The Christian life is built up of going into the presence of God for refreshment renewal and guidance and then reaching out to others.
- “When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.” Although Jesus and his disciples had tried to go away by themselves to get some rest and for the disciples to be able to tell Jesus of what had happened when he sent them out two by two, as soon as Jesus saw people in need he talked to them and healed them.
- In today's reading from St Mark's gospel we get a strong sense of the enormous pressure Jesus and his disciples were under at this point in his ministry. We are also reminded that Jesus as a man suffered as we do from tiredness, hunger, and stress. But however he is feeling, when he sees people in need he goes all out to help them.
- Jesus is at the height of his popularity and although his conflict with the religious authorities has begun it has not yet escalated into full' public confrontation. To the crowds who follow him everywhere he goes, Jesus is still a teacher and healer, not primarily a political player. He knows they come to him for immediate gratification and to satisfy their pressing need. Just like sheep they have no long-term plans. Sheep don't worry about what will happen when they have eaten all the grass in the field, or when winter comes. That's the job of the shepherd.
- In the same way the people who flock round Jesus have come either just for entertainment or for healing, but without any idea that what Jesus is offering has more long-term consequences than either of these things. That's what he sees as he looks at them: he sees sheep with no shepherd and, we are told, he began to teach them many things – not make decisions for them, like their shepherd, but teach them things so that they can be human beings and not sheep any more.

- The fact that Jesus saw the crowds as sheep without a shepherd echoes the prophecy of Jeremiah that we heard in our first reading. The shepherds as Jeremiah describes them are sinful kings who have brought disaster on Judah. They are described in more detail in the previous chapter. Yet Jeremiah states that human sin can never defeat the triumph of God. He will redeem his people in the end. In the world we have grown up in in our lifetimes, marked by the terrible consequences of evil leadership, the message of future hope is extremely relevant.
- Jeremiah looks forward to a particular king who will be a true descendant of David. He will be more than just a good king, he will be the Lord our Righteousness. For Christians the prophecy is, of course, fulfilled in Jesus, the good shepherd and rightful king. What a contrast between the humble, loving Jesus of today's gospel reading and the violent, unjust oppression exercised by the kings criticised by Jeremiah.
- The reading from Mark reminds us of Jesus' humanity. The reading from Ephesians, on the other hand reminds us of the cross. It is a magnificent description of the effect of the cross on the future of humanity. Paul explains that Jesus' death on the cross has removed at a stroke the hostile division between Jew and Gentile. Yet, says Paul, God is doing much more than bringing Jew and Gentile together. The cross means peace between believers and peace with God, in a community where God himself now dwells.
- This passage states the reality of our unity in Christ. It also urges us to work in the power of the Spirit, both to break down social and ethnic barriers within the church and to encourage those currently outside God's people to become part of his new creation.
- In all our readings the consequences of seeking healing and wholeness included being turned from a crowd into a community. God promised to make a single flock under a righteous king; Jesus drew the people together and became their shepherd as he taught them; the Ephesians, people who had been alienated and strangers, without hope, were brought together in Christ and the dividing wall of hostility between them came down.
- We all rejoiced when the Berlin wall came down. How sad it is to know there is a wall between Israel and the West Bank. There is little we can do about that apart from pray, but we can ensure we don't build barriers between us and others in our lives today.

- In our Gospel reading we are offered a dichotomy. Jesus and his disciples needed food, rest and a quiet time together, but the crowds needed them. How do we keep ourselves fit to share the Gospel without exhausting ourselves? We need to carve out a time of rest and quietness with God while being aware of the needs of so many other people. As David Adam has said, “Christians must learn to go to God with people in their heart and to people with God in their heart.
- May you find time to be with God and with those who need you in the coming week.