

# **Sermon on Sunday 18 July 2021**

## **by Melanie Seward, Lay Reader**

*Readings: Psalm 119. 105- 112 and Mark 6. 30- 34*

### **Back to Basics**



**Jesus “saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.” (Mark 6. 34)**

In Palestine, two thousand years ago, The Jewish people were feeling as if life was passing them by, even as if God had forgotten them or at least side-lined their nation. Life in the Roman Empire felt unjust; it was a struggle.

It didn't help that many religious institutions seemed to have got entangled with those who had wealth and influence. Arguments about how to keep the rules were obscuring spirituality in a way that hindered life rather than it encouraged it to flourish. Where was the Messiah? The one promised by God who would save them and renew their world? They were like sheep without a shepherd.

Maybe, this chimes with your experience and you have felt something of this about the Church or our society today.

What does Jesus have to say about this? Well, he does speak of a new kingdom and order to be brought about by God. He doesn't talk about forming a political party or leading a march on Jerusalem or deliberately whipping up anti-Roman/ anti-authority feelings. But he does take positive and clear steps.

Jesus does challenge the views of the time, as well, in placing a priority on love and peace. He does call out injustice and challenge people on the issues of poverty and discrimination. Most of all he seems to say – let each individual start with their own life. He asks us to look at our own relationship with God and at our own relationships with others.

Jesus looks at the Rich Young Man who claims he has kept all God's commands since he was young and loves him - and then throws out the challenge: will he give his wealth to the poor and follow Jesus? (Mark 10. 21). He says to the disciples, never mind what everyone else thinks, who do you say I am? (Mark 8. 29). After healing Legion, Jesus sends him away to tell people how much Jesus has done for him (Mark 5. 20). The question he throws out to the crowd is, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?" (Mark 8. 36).

Jesus teaches: It starts with each of us.

What to do? Where to go? How to use our time? Who to turn to? Which path to take? Have we ever felt like a sheep without a Shepherd? Not knowing what to do next – either too busy, confused or just bored and at a loss or, perhaps, overcome by a general vague feeling at not understanding what living is supposed to mean or be about.

Jesus teaches: It starts with each of us turning to God - he says walk with me and I will show you the Way.

But how do we walk with him? Firstly, by prayer. Prayer is not 'talking to ourselves'; it is reaching for the presence behind all creation. To pray is to tune in to that spiritual frequency; maybe it is just to acknowledge God's presence in our lives, like switching on a radio. Sometimes we end up expressing our deepest thoughts and feelings, like becoming embroiled in our favourite broadcast or show. Sometimes we tune in to simply listen and wait for what is to come next - to hope, to seek peace and to discern where God is leading us.

The guidance we desire can be about the future path of our work or volunteer roles as well as our relationships and lifestyles. The practice of waiting for God's revelation of what we are to do next is a good one, but all too often we are having to sort out life as we experience it. Thought conversations with God are a way to try to navigate life... they may start out as a cry out for help, a complaint or sharing your sense of humour!

Jesus teaches: It starts with each of us turning to God - walk with me and I will show you the Way.

So, stay hungry to learn more. I want to highlight the fact that Jesus has this deep emotional response to the crowd and, he responds to their needs by teaching them; by offering the guidance of a Shepherd. Yes, in Mark's Gospel, he goes on to see to it that they are fed with bread and fish. And yes, he heals physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, as he meets individuals, but Jesus recognises that fundamentally people need to learn more about themselves and God, more about living in community with others, if they are to have life as God meant it to be.

Today it is no different. We too need to go back to basics: by seeking to learn more about God through prayer and meditation, through learning more about God's word in the Bible, through giving voice to our questions as well as listening to the experiences of others.

We all need to keep on learning. In his earthly ministry, Jesus as 'God made man' gives us a unique insight into what it means to live as man, woman, brother, sister, child and neighbour. In his teachings recorded by his followers, it is possible to encounter what God is saying to us. And Jesus, out of compassion for the human condition, wants to teach us. The Risen Jesus invites us to walk with him and, on this journey of encounter, to discover the inner love and peace we all need.



**'Your word is a lamp to my feet  
and a light for my path.'  
(Psalm 119. 105)**

**Discover the section of the church  
website that looks at ['Faith'](#).**

**There is a section on Prayer and some  
other 'thought provoking' topics about  
making sense of life.**