

St. James the Great
Sunday 18th July 2021

Mark Ch. 6 vs 30-34/53-end

Jesus- The Good Shepherd

Recently Prince Charles has been speaking about the decline of small farms. He warned that if family farms are forced out of business it will be devastating for the British countryside. I remember as a young child in my Mother's family home standing on a box churning butter and watching the butter rise to the top as I churned. Everyone if they were able could make some contribution however small. The old and new testaments were written against a

background of a farming and agricultural world. It was a world where families had to make an attempt to feed themselves and so we get warnings and parables that pick up on that way of life.

Consequently, we have the image of the shepherd firstly in the reading from Jeremiah. Here we find the prophet Jeremiah speaking God's words of rebuke to the leaders of Israel. The complaint in Jeremiah is about uncaring leaders who instead of gathering God's people scatter them. It's a complaint about those who don't care for those in their charge.

This theme of a shepherd is taken up by King David in the 23rd Psalm, the one I'm sure with which we're all

familiar: 'The Lord is my Shepherd'...David was a shepherd boy and he often bravely fought off lions and bears and rescued his sheep from them. As he shepherded day by day he would have had plenty of time to reflect and pictured God as a Good Shepherd. And so that beautiful psalm was written.

In the gospel we find Jesus as the true and faithful shepherd. He and his disciples are desperately seeking rest. The crowds have been chasing after them in the way that pop stars are pursued in these days, but instead of telling them to go away his heart aches for them. He recognises their vulnerability; he sees their great need for

help, healing and leadership and has a deep feeling of compassion towards them. That feeling of compassion comes straight from the heart of God and extends to us as well. So in spite of his tiredness, his desire to get away to a quiet place, he responds to their needs and heals those who are brought to him. No one was turned away.

Often a person's need is not always spoken. We have to detect the need, to be tuned in ourselves to the loving heart of God in order to recognise that anyone can have a pressing need. Many people are quite Stoical, they bear things alone. As we grow and mature we realise that we are in continual need of healing and restoration. With most of us "there's always something", as they say.

Whether we want to bring to God a physical need, a mental or a spiritual one, whether it's a relationship problem where the need is for reconciliation or whether it's not even for ourselves at all, we can come to Christ who is the one with a heart of compassion for us. We don't even need to say anything, just come, because Jesus himself says: 'I know my sheep.' He must know also that we're not very 'sheep like' but a mixture of all sorts of idiosyncrasies.

I've been wondering what an equivalent image of a Good Shepherd is today in our world of technology, and I've come up with one. A couple of weeks ago we got up at 2.30am to get to the airport for our plane to Madeira

which is on the 'green' list. Even so, some might doubt the wisdom of that! But there we were, well on time. We'd done, on my mobile, what I believed was everything that was required by Covid rules for entry to Madeira, but alas at the check-in desk my mobile wouldn't work. That's okay I said, we'll get the computer out it's all on there. But shock horror that wouldn't work either. The crowds were great, hundreds of people queuing and I don't exaggerate, many with problems, some with children who were getting frustrated. We were moved away from the desk to let others through. One or two of the staff tried to help us but failed. The clock was ticking, the queue was disappearing to nothing, and then one young assistant had

the idea of trying to pick up my information via my husband's mobile which was working. As she pressed buttons furiously it was announced that the gate was closing for our flight. But then, all of a sudden, in answer to my prayer, she succeeded and shouted: 'hallelujah'! We had to run off as fast as we could to gate 46 and were the last people to board the plane.

As we learn from the gospel Jesus was just as busy as the busiest of people today...surrounded by great crowds who had found someone, someone who cared and had a heart of compassion, willing and able to help them, just as that young woman was for us.

The ancient world was dominated by farming and agriculture, ours is dominated, more and more, by technology and even there Jesus has time for us, finds a way for us ... if we can make time for him.
Amen.