

*Jeremiah 23:1-6 / Psalm 23 / Ephesians 2:11-22 / Mark 6.30-34, 53-56*

*Preached on 21 July 2024 at Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Adelaide by Pastor Tom Pietsch*

*Heavenly Father, give us rest and healing, so that we may be free to meditate on your Word. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

## **Introduction**

Today's Gospel is not especially dramatic, at least by the standards that have been set in recent weeks. No one is beheaded, or raised from the dead, there is no belligerent confrontation with Jesus or even a programmatic sending out of the apostles. Instead, we have what is comparatively more mundane. Our reading is actually in two halves. After the first verses 30-34, it skips over the dramatic events of Jesus feeding the 5000 and then walking on water, only to take it up again at the less dramatic verses 53-56. None of the verses we heard today are likely to make it into a children's bible.

But for this reason, we can be attuned to the Gospel in a slightly different way today – paying attention to the quotidian, daily life of Jesus, how he conducted his ministry week in week out, and so also how he conducts his ministry with you week in week out, and also sets a pattern for you for your life. Our Gospel gives us the rhythms of ministry, and the rhythms of life with Christ.

## **Telling Christ Everything**

The reading begins in the context of the apostles having been sent out two by two, bearing Jesus' authority over unclean spirits. They had been given the charge to travel village by village, calling people to repentance.

Now, <sup>30</sup> *The apostles gathered around Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught.*

They return from their mission, and we don't hear that Jesus asked them anything, just that they told him everything that they had done and taught.

By the apostles telling Jesus everything, we are reminded that they went out with Jesus' authority, and now his deputies are reporting back. While the apostles were in ministry, it was always Jesus' ministry, just as it remains today. Pastors are sent with Christ's authority, and they are in turn accountable to Christ, reporting back to him what they have done and taught, to ensure that they have not deviated from the authority given them by Christ. And not just pastors but all Christians, all of you who are a royal priesthood. All of our Christian mission and service is subordinate to Christ – from Christ, and for Christ. And if you read other places in the Gospels, you'll even see that Jesus himself operates in this way, handing on the Word that He received from the Father by his charge (e.g. John 17:6ff).

But by telling Jesus everything, the apostles also reveal a more human, even tender, reality. We don't hear Jesus asking them for a report, but just that they want to tell him everything. Sometimes in life we can have a need just to tell people what's been going on in our lives, especially people who have authority over us. Children, when they are comfortable, can talk for ages to parents and grandparents, telling them everything they've done. And the same is true for adults. Once I spent time with an authority figure, and as I walked away I realised most of our time together was me just telling him

things. I wanted someone in charge to know what I'd been doing. Perhaps you experience the same. Perhaps you are often called upon to just listen to people in your charge. But for all of us, we have here an invitation to tell Christ everything that we have done and taught, the judgements that we've made in life and why. To test your thoughts and your mind in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7). To let him know what is going on in your life, with the great confidence that there is someone in charge who wants to listen to the things on your mind, the things that burden you. "Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

### **Labouring and Resting with Christ**

Let's return to our reading.

*<sup>31</sup> [Jesus] said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. <sup>32</sup> And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves.*

Right before our reading, Mark tells of the beheading of John the Baptist, a dramatic event that Pastor Fraser preached on last week, and which would have raised the temperature of the followers of Jesus. The apostles had been serving two-by-two in that context, and now we hear of a kind of chaos of consternation, that so many people were coming and going that they didn't even have the leisure to eat.

And it is after this period of intense labour, that Jesus invites the apostles "*Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.*"

As we consider the rhythms of life with Christ, we can see an intense period of labour, followed now by a dedicated period of rest, much like God himself models in the creation of the world, resting on the Sabbath. Christ now gives a pattern to the apostles, and a pattern to us, of both work and rest (cf Mark 3:14). That may sound pretty intuitive, but that doesn't make it common or easy.

Today it seems there is an increasing tendency to never work properly, with dedication and clear focus, and then never to rest properly, never to fully switch off. Instead everyone is all the time sort of on and sort of off. This absence of rhythm and boundaries was only exacerbated by Covid, when work, rest, home, and play all merged together. And technology doesn't help with boundaries, in fact its mission is often to erase boundaries. So that while working, play is only the touch of a button away, and while resting, work is only the touch of a button away.

But Jesus has a desire to give his apostles, and to give you, proper rest. "*Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.*"... <sup>32</sup> *And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. <sup>33</sup> Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them.*

One interesting feature of this is that Jesus can't have been using the boat for a speedy passage. After all, people could beat them to the other side of the lake on foot. Instead, in the same way as why some people might go fishing or on a cruise ship today, they go on a boat to remove distractions, to take away some of the variables of life so that they can have freedom to rest.

We can pay attention to this ourselves too. A time for work, and a time for rest. A time to switch off the internet and the screens. A time to retreat, and then a time to engage. We can feel guilty about resting, but Jesus himself did it, and calls the apostles to do it. The medieval world, which had a social order

more attuned to the Christian life than our own, had both many fast days, and many feast days, many days of labour, many days of rest. Today we can have neither – neither fasting, nor feasting, neither good work, nor good rest. We need to hear Jesus' invitation again: *"Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while."*

Following the storms on Friday, we were without power at our house until a few hours ago. Oddly enough, we found ourselves planning to perhaps go without electricity on purpose again one day. We rested in a way we didn't normally.

### **Christ, the Giver of Rest**

Let's continue with our reading: <sup>34</sup> *As he went ashore, [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.*

When Jesus gets off the boat, he immediately sees people in need, the people who had beaten him there on foot, and has compassion on them. It sounds like Jesus' retreat has been interrupted, although it was the apostles he was inviting to rest. And we don't hear of them breaking their rest.

Instead, it is Jesus who acts. He sees need, just as He sees your need, and He has compassion. The people are like sheep without a shepherd, lacking good leadership, liable to scatter, vulnerable to predators. Perhaps we could also diagnose our own situation. The Gospel is perhaps giving a reference the chaos after John the Baptist's death. Or perhaps it is a broader reference to the failure of Israel's leaders to provide care. In that context, in the prophet Ezekiel we hear this: "Thus says the Lord God; I myself will look after and tend my sheep... I myself will pasture my sheep; I myself will give them rest" (Ezekiel 34:11).

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, has come give us rest. To take the brunt of the devil's attack, even dying for the sheep and rising again, so that we can be looked after, pastured, rested. And there's an interesting dimension to Jesus' compassion here. Because as a result of this compassion, Mark tells us that he taught them. That is striking because at other times, Jesus' compassion leads him to heal people or feed them (see Matthew 15:32; 20:34; Mark 1:41; Luke 7:13). But now it's teaching. He diagnoses what they need, and what we need, as the teaching that comes from God. Jesus' compassion to you too is not just for your physical needs, but also for your soul. His teaching is compassionate. His teaching provides rest for your soul. So too the mission of the church is to care for the poor, but also to teach his Word, as an act of compassion.

### **Putting ourselves where Jesus is**

Let's get to our final verses, which skip forwards to the time after Jesus has walked on water.

<sup>53</sup> *When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat.* <sup>54</sup> *When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him* <sup>55</sup> *and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was.* <sup>56</sup> *And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.*

Again the crowds rush to Jesus. And they place themselves where they know Jesus will be. It happened when they went on foot to the other side of the lake. It happens now when Jesus gets out of the boat. And then it happens when people lay the sick in the marketplaces, confident that that is where Jesus

will be, and so that they can access his healing. It even sounds as if they've learnt from the haemorrhaging woman that all they need to do is reach out in faith and touch Jesus, to be healed.

And so to for us. Today is a day of rest, a time to rest a while. And what have we done but put ourselves where we know Jesus will be? The place where two or three are gathered in His name. And like the sick in the marketplaces, it's also the place where we cry out to God for mercy. And where we can have confidence that he will hear us, that he will give us rest for our souls, that he will have compassion on us, by forgiving us our sins, and teaching us his ways, and the rhythm of life in Christ.

## **Conclusion**

Next week, our Gospel reading will return to more dramatic action – the feeding of the 5000 and Jesus walking on water. But, for now, let us together hear the invitation of our Saviour to “*Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.*” And as we have been gathered in the place where Jesus is, let us together reach out to him with confidence that he has compassion on us, and has power to save.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

*And may the peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.*