

## **A Reflection from Revd Ali for Trinity 7 ~ Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> July 2021**

The prophet Jeremiah lived during one of the most troubled times in Hebrew history; the decades leading up to the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC, followed by the Babylonian exile of the people of God. Despite the fall of the sacred city, despite being taken into exile in Babylon, Jeremiah remained faithful to his calling as a prophet of God; praying, preaching, writing and believing.

In our first reading (Jeremiah 23: 1 – 6), Jeremiah was passing on the great good news to the people of Israel that; despite all the times they had turned away from God; all the times that they had worshipped the Baals instead of the one true God; all the times they had ignored the 10 best ways to live that Moses had brought down from Mount Sinai; despite all the foreign powers that had triumphed over the people of God; despite the people of God following false prophets; God still was faithful to them. God would send someone to gather the people of God in diaspora; the people of God in apostasy; the people of God who had turned their backs on the one true God. Jeremiah assured the people in exile that God would send a shepherd. A shepherd who would be for all the people, a mighty Saviour and king. The people were to have hope. To repent of their distance from God and turn once again to the one true God. Their faithful God who would free Judah and bring peace to Israel.

Many years later, the people of God had returned to Jerusalem, the temple and the walls had been rebuilt but the people still lived in expectation of the Messiah who would be a wise and merciful king, the faithful shepherd who would gather the flock together again. But as we know, Jesus wasn't quite what they had expected....

In our reading from Mark (6: 30 – 34, 53 – 56), so much has already happened in just this one chapter, as we have heard over the last couple of weeks. At the beginning of chapter 6 Jesus had preached in the synagogue in Nazareth. Despite the wisdom of Jesus' teaching, the people who had known him as just Mary and Joseph, the carpenter's son, dismiss him; a prophet without honour in his own town. So, Jesus left Nazareth and travelled from village to village with his disciples, teaching and healing wherever they went. After the disciples had spent time with Jesus, listening to his wisdom, witnessing the miracles, having their long-held views about God and the kingdom of heaven challenged, the disciples come to the end of that first part of their 'apprenticeship' with him. Jesus sends them out in pairs, to preach the good news that the kingdom of God had come near. That the people should repent and turn once again to God. Whilst they were away, John the Baptist was murdered by Herod. An event that sent shockwaves through Jesus' followers as well as the community that had gathered around John.

When the disciples come back from their missionary adventures, they report all that had happened, all that they had learnt and all that they had done. Jesus was pleased with them, they have got rid of their 'L' plates. They have been transformed from disciples to apostles, sharing in Jesus' ministry. The disciples had grown and developed in their ministry, but Jesus was also aware of their human need to rest and be restored. They had given out so much of themselves, spiritually and physically, it was time for rest. It was time for Jesus to hear their stories and for the group to share their experiences. So, Jesus called them away with him to a deserted place where they can be alone and process all that had happened. They got into the boat with him and as it transpired, the only alone time they have with Jesus, is during the boat journey. Word got out that Jesus was travelling across the lake and by the time they landed there was a great crowd waiting for them.

Jesus' planned time of retreat with his new apostles were scuppered by the gathered crowd. Perhaps Jesus told them 'later' as he turned to the crowd and saw individuals who were lost, broken, despairing, grieving; sheep without a shepherd - just as Jeremiah had prophesied. Jesus had compassion on the crowd and began to teach. He fed them, mind, heart and soul. Those people who had recognized their own emptiness, their poverty of spirit and mind and had sought Jesus out.

When he had taught the crowd, Jesus realized that their emptiness wasn't just spiritual or emotional, it was physical too. Jesus told his new apostles to provide food for the crowd. The

shiny new apostles were flummoxed, despite their time spent with Jesus, despite their missionary adventures, they still couldn't see past the practical problem of feeding thousands of people. So, Jesus took one small child's lunch of bread and fish, blessed it and fed everyone, with much left over.

Jesus had nourished their minds and their spirits and then he nourished their bodies. Jesus understood the connection between the physical, spiritual and emotional. After all, he was there at the beginning of creation. He understood that the people were wondrously made in the image of God. But people are needy. Needy for company, love, food and drink, inspiration, creativity and rest. Jesus understood the many needs of body, mind and spirit so he fed the hungry, healed the sick and brought hope to the hopeless.

Jesus dismissed the crowd when their needs had been met and sends the disciples off across the lake. Perhaps they will now get the retreat they need. But the people responded to the miraculous teaching and feeding by Jesus. They brought their sick friends and family and laid them at Jesus' feet. Some immediately placed their faith in Jesus, some had faith having engaged with Jesus, and perhaps others just needed to see Jesus and witness his miracles for themselves.

Whatever their motivation to race around the lake to see Jesus, it was their heart's desire to be made well and for others to be made well too. The openness with which they accept Jesus and his ability to heal is in marked contrast to the negativity of the Pharisees, the religious leaders and the Scribes.

There is so much in just one short chapter. Mark's breathless retelling of Jesus' story challenges us to think about where we are, on that spectrum of belief. Are we with those people who dashed round the lake with open hearts and minds or are we more measured in our response to Jesus' invitation to come and see?

Mark's Gospel challenges us to think about what is happening in our heads and our hearts when we think about Jesus? Sometimes we engage with Jesus on an intellectual level - our heads can be filled with the knowledge of Jesus, of his life, death and resurrection, but there can be a disconnect with our hearts and our spirit. Jesus knows and understands how we work, physically, mentally and spiritually and wants us all to flourish in body, mind and spirit. To have life and life in all its fullness. To have that life we have to engage with Jesus with our head and our heart. To recognize that we too may be in need Jesus' healing - just like those people who hurried round the lake.

When we come to Jesus for healing Jesus has compassion on us in our human frailty. Jesus understands what it is to be human, understands that we might be too scared to ask for help, or unable to verbalize just what we need. Jesus calls to him all those who are struggling in body, mind or spirit. Jesus cares for each of us and wants us to be healed and whole.

He is the one that Jeremiah proclaimed. He is the one that came so that we can have a relationship with God the Father through him. He is the king of heaven who loves us with an unconditional and everlasting love. He is the shepherd who will gather up all the lost and the lonely. There is no longer any need to be afraid, terrified or for anyone to be missing, declares the Lord\*. The day has already come. The Lord has raised up for us all a king who reigns wisely, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It is just up to us whether we open our hearts and minds to him and crown him as king of our hearts and lives.

Amen.

\*Jeremiah 23:4