

Address by Ann Robinson Reader

It never fails, does it? You've had a really exhausting day, rushing here and there all the time as if there was a rocket after you. The car has broken down, the washer hasn't worked properly, it is raining and the phone has never stopped ringing. But at last you have managed to make a cup of coffee, maybe even with a chocolate biscuit and you are sitting quietly with the latest magazine that you have been trying to read for the last week. Imagine it; utter bliss!! Then the doorbell rings to reveal a friend you haven't seen for ages and they have called in on the off chance. Peace gone.

Jesus and the disciples must have felt like this. The disciples were returning from their first mission and wanted to tell Jesus all about it. He and they were extremely tired and needed space to recharge. Jesus knew that his cousin John Baptist had been beheaded at the order of Herod and this had been on a whim. The news of this must have saddened Jesus and so he too

needed some time apart.

In the reading from Mark's gospel, there is a gap in the verses, going from verse 34 to 53. During the intervening time several events had taken place. The 5000 had been fed, Jesus had walked on the water towards the disciples and he had gone into the mountains to pray. Jesus realized that the disciples needed to unwind and recharge after their first solo mission. Mark does not make much of the disciples going out but much more about them returning. He honours them by calling them apostles but leaves us in no doubt of the symbolism of returning to the root for sustenance; turning to their Lord for nurture.

Jesus tried to get away from the crowds and it is here in two ways that we see his humanity and compassion. He knows that the disciples need time with him alone but he also knows that the people need to hear him, touch him, see him. The Lake of Galilee is small. It is about 4 miles across and about 10 miles round to the other side. We know that a storm had blown up because Jesus

calmed it and the little fishing boats may have been driven off course. It would take a long time to reach the other side and those who were walking got there first, eager to be in the presence of this man. The disciples had had enough and wanted to send the crowd away and were none too pleased when Jesus took pity on them.

There are two phrases which stand out in this passage. "He had compassion on them" and "like sheep without a shepherd". To show compassion means to be so inwardly moved that you have to do something and we know how much Jesus did for us. It shows the humanity of Jesus and his recognition of what those who followed him needed.

John Cairns who was the principal of United Presbyterian Hall in Edinburgh wrote that people were "like lost children out in the rain" and in Dante's *Inferno* there is a line which states "I woke up in the middle of the wood and it was dark and there was no clear way before me".

There are so many times when we feel like that, at a crossroads when we really don't know what to do. Jesus knew that the people were searching for something even if they weren't aware of it and if we look around at the world today the same problem exists. A shepherd provides security for his flock; he shields them from harm; he provides pasture for them; he gives strength and inspiration. All of which we can find in Jesus as our shepherd.

There are two dangers in life; that of too much activity and that of too little, withdrawing from what is around us. We know that our lives are busy, there is too much to do and not enough time in which to do it. But we need to set aside time for reflection, time to recharge, time with God to listen and give him a chance to speak to us. If we go to the opposite extreme and spend too much time recharging we will forget the part of giving of ourselves. Someone once said:

I'm convinced that God put me here to accomplish a certain number of things. Right now, I'm so far behind, I don't think I'll

ever die.

So we need to get a move on!

In the reading from Mark there is so much to be thought about but the ones which stand out for me are the compassion and humanity of Christ and that he looks after us like a shepherd.

We have Jesus as our shepherd, to love and care for us, to guide us and give us the strength to pass on the compassion that he shows and, like a shepherd with his sheep, to find us when we are lost. Jesus will never fail us even if we feel that he is far away and will never change. A short prayer:

Dear Lord, may we rest awhile in your presence and feel your touch. Help us to break down the barriers that separate us from others. Let them draw near to us and let them touch us. Amen.