

Text: Mark 6:30-56

Theme: Meet Jesus the Shepherd King

Sermon delivered by Revd Canon Dele Agbelusi during Service of the Word on 26/11/2017 at 10.30am

In the past week, we have seen on our TV screens the fall of Robert Mugabe and the joy of the people for getting rid of a bad leader. So, what are people looking for in a good leader? One with Charisma who is winsome, with a good sense of humour, a visionary, a man of integrity, savvy. Mugabe started with a lot of promise 37 years ago, but gradually became so power-drunk that tyranny became his second name. As a leader, he was supposed to be the shepherd of the people but he was only fleecing them. Many of our political leaders and regrettably, some religious leaders fall into this category.

However, the type of shepherd and ruler being introduced to us by Mark is of a different pedigree. To *claim* to be God's shepherd is one thing, to prove it is another. And in that well known episode of the feeding of the 5000 which we read a few minutes ago in Mark 6, we are given a wonderful glimpse into the heart and activity of God's shepherd and King, who over 2000 years later has not changed one bit.

First, we have 'The Compassionate Shepherd King' (Verses 30-34).

The disciples came back from a successful time of ministry, being sent by Jesus into the towns of Galilee (Mark 6:7-12). 'They preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many people with oil and healed them.' When they returned, Jesus knew they needed a time of rest so he instructed them to get into the boat and come with Him "to a quiet place and get some rest." (v. 31). **Verse 33. But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.**

The disciples who often saw the crowds as *work*, and as constant *demands*, especially at a time like this when their well-deserved rest was interrupted by them wanted to send the crowd away (v.36), but Jesus had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.' (v.34)

Through his tender eyes he sees what others fail to see- a flock which is lost, harassed and hopeless. Though they had supposed shepherds like the religious leaders back in Jerusalem, but they were abusive shepherds, more concerned with themselves and their standing than the people and their need. But Jesus saw them differently. **Each face reflected a need, a hunger, or a hurt. Jesus cared more about the needs of someone else than he cared about His own needs.**

A Caring Shepherd King who Satisfies (Verses 35-42).

Jesus knew that without a shepherd, sheep were in a lot of trouble. They can't fend for themselves against predators and have a hard time finding the food and water they need. **So He began to teach them many things: As a faithful Shepherd, Jesus took care of their most pressing need. He fed them with the Word of God.** When you lack vision, life becomes mundane and pointless. When you lack true knowledge of God life becomes shallow and self-centred. When you lack hope, then life soon becomes swallowed up in despair. And so these things which lie at the root of all our human problems need to be addressed and the way they are addressed is through teaching the truth, letting folk have a taste of a greater reality. What is needed is to hear the good news of a rescue from God which gives us a vision of what God is really like and what we are really made for, how he is not a God a million light years away unconcerned with our plight but a God who comes himself to live amongst his people in the person of his Son and who lovingly shepherds his people. You can be the poorest

person on earth materially but have something which the richest king could never buy- eternal life knowing God personally.

Jesus's care is for the total person. See what happens next in -v 35 **'By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. "This is a remote place," they said, "and it's already very late. Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.'**

Send the people away. Both Jesus and the disciples saw exactly the same need among the multitude. The disciple's solution was to get rid of the need by getting rid of the needy. Jesus saw a different solution and wanted the disciples to see it also. Verse 37 "But he answered, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "That would take more than half a year's wages"! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?"

It's hard to know if the disciples were *angry* or just *couldn't believe* what Jesus said. Clearly, they thought spending about a year's income to feed this multitude for one meal was not only impossible but also a waste. Shouldn't the money be spent on something else?" But Jesus will perform an extravagant miracle because He wanted to sit down to a dinner with the multitude – because He loved them. It never entered their minds that Jesus might provide for the multitude with a miracle. **God has resources that we know nothing about, so we can trust Him and be at peace even when we can't figure out how He will provide.**

Although the answer to prayer is standing right there in front of them they don't even bother to pray! It is much easier to pout than to pray and that is what many of us do. If it had simply been left to the disciples the people would have crawled away hungry. And to be frank, if things were simply to be left to the church today many in our land would remain spiritually hungry, for many a church sees the challenges as too great and the resources too meagre and so are paralysed into inactivity. But that is because we refuse to lift our eyes above the circumstances to the one who is Lord over the circumstances- Jesus.

When the disciples didn't pray -Jesus prayed; he didn't moan about what he didn't have but thanked God for what he *did* have which admittedly wasn't much. (Verse 41) 'Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves.'

He takes the paucity of what they do have to offer, 5 loaves, two fish and he multiplies it. And are we not glad that he did and still does? And when that happens we delight in the King who satisfies, vv 42-44, 'They all ate and were satisfied, 43 and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. 44 The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.' Our problem is that we are so familiar with this story that the sheer mind blowing wonder of it all is lost on us. This should not have happened! You do not normally feed 5,000 people to such an extent that they have to adjust their belts and go on a workout programme because they are so full with five rolls and a couple of fish. But that is the point, in Jesus hands things are not normal, they are supernatural. **He goes beyond our expectations as he transforms a potential famine into a feast! Friends, this is the God who is bigger than our complaints. This is the God who seems to delight in proving us wrong so that we might start proving him right.**

You know, it is so easy for us to be so consumed by what we think we *don't* have that we fail to thank God for what we *do* have. We may look at our family and feel terribly anxious as parents or grandparents as we wonder what the outcome will be for our children and grandchildren as we see society sliding further and further into the mire. As a church family, we may look at the growing number of un-evangelised people and the cool response with which the Gospel is so often met. But neither response is what Jesus is looking for.

So the last thing we are to do is sit around despairing and listing all the problems, for then we shall never experience God's blessing. No, what we have to do is to go out with what we have in order to do the job God has given us to do and see him work.

What happens next? (verses 45-56) – **The Hard Hearted Disciples.**

Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. ⁴⁶ After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray. Jesus loved the multitude, but he was not obsessed with crowds. He knew when to kindly tell them to go home and went to pray. He has had a long and difficult day ministering to the spiritual and physical needs of the multitude and was exhausted. **But that hard day drove Jesus to prayer, not from prayer.**

Verse 47-50 - Later that night, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. Shortly before dawn he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, because they all saw him and were terrified. Immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." ⁵¹ Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, ⁵² for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.

As Jesus prayed in the heights above the Sea of Galilee, **He saw them straining at oars** as they attempted to cross the lake in the face of the **wind**. Unknown to the disciples, Jesus saw their difficulty and cared for them. "He came walking on the waves; and so he puts all the swelling storms of life under his feet... (Augustine) But the disciples were freaked out. They still did not understand.

Why? Because their hearts were hardened. **They had witnessed the miracles, listened to the talks, seen the power of Jesus at work in their lives on their evangelistic outreach and yet failed to grasp that Jesus is the Lord, the Messiah, the King of kings because their hearts were hard and stubborn.**

Our natural spiritual hearts are hardened even if we witness all the miracles unless they are softened, melted by God's Holy Spirit. Stubborn hearts don't receive divine truths of God. They usually bounce back – like the seed that fell on shallow soil or among thorns. Someone once said, **the heart of the human problem is the problem of the heart and I agree.**

We can know so much about Jesus, but still not trust him and consciously invite him into our hearts. Then what happens? Our hearts become hard. We hear many things, but nothing changes us. Listen to Jesus today as he asks you to open the door of your heart to him. Pray that God softens your heart so you may hear him and turn to him completely.

In today's passage, Mark wants us to know who Jesus really is. "the Way, the Truth and the Life' (John 14:6). He wants us to know that Jesus is the Good Shepherd, who will give his life for the sheep, who gives the multitude food because they are hungry! He gives them teaching, God's Word, because we need to hear the truth. Jesus gives them a special miracle, not just to fill their stomachs or to make them excited. It is to make them and us see who Jesus is. It is like a road sign. It points the lost sheep to Jesus. And all these demand a response from us. A response of faith and desperation that God softens our hearts and opens our ears.

Miracles can never satisfy us. They are like the bread. Soon we will be hungry again. But Jesus came to meet our real needs. We need him. He is the Bread of life. He satisfies us for ever.