



Sunday Reflection

Ordinary Time

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 18 July 2021

Pentecost 8

As the crowds gathered around Jesus, longing to be healed and fed, so we gather to worship, learn and share in Christ's body, so that refreshed we can continue to serve the Lord.

Reflection for this week's Gospel

"And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves." Mark 6:32

An Illustration to set the scene

In 1966, John Lennon famously remarked that the Beatles were "more popular than Jesus".

At the height of Beatlemania, the band was hounded by thousands of screaming fans. News reports likened the adulation of the fans to a religious fervour and in 1965 Lennon had complained that while on tour in the United States "people kept bringing blind, crippled and deformed children into our dressing room and this boy's mother would say, 'Go on, kiss him, maybe you'll bring back his sight.'"

George Harrison later said that the band often locked themselves in their hotel bathroom so they could get some peace.

In the end, the crowds became too much, and the Beatles stopped touring to focus on studio recordings before finally disbanding in 1970.

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

In today's Gospel, Jesus and the disciples are as popular as the Beatles.

The twelve have just returned from their first mission trip, when they called people to repentance, taught anyone willing to listen, cast out demons and healed those who were sick.

Now they need a break.

They need some time to catch up with Jesus and have a well-earned rest, but the crowds just will not leave them alone.

Even when they get into the boats and head for a nice quiet spot on the other side of the lake, the crowds hot-foot it round to meet them when they land.

Despite really needing to spend some time with his disciples, Jesus sees that the people in the crowd are "like sheep without a shepherd".

In Biblical times a shepherd would not just protect the flock, he would lead the flock to new pasture, so this probably means the people needed leadership.

And so he "began to teach them many things."

Now, you may have noticed that at this point the lectionary has missed out eighteen verses. Why?

Well, the missing bit has enough material for several more sermons, including the feeding of the five thousand, but that is a story for another day.

Suffice it to say, after everyone had been fed, Jesus sent the disciples off by boat, sent the crowds home, and at last found time to pray quietly.

Up on the mountain, on his own with God.

Later that evening, as the disciples were making slow progress rowing into a head-wind, he strolled across the lake and climbed into the boat before they all landed together at Gennesaret.

At last, Jesus would be able to have a proper conversation with his disciples and find out how their mission trips went.

But no.

As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognised him and rushed to bring their sick out for healing.

And so it went on.

Wherever Jesus 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”.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

Jesus has compassion on the crowds and tries to meet their needs, but he also tries to meet the needs of the disciples and his own need for time with God.

As soon as the disciples had collected up the leftovers, he told them to get in the boat and go on ahead.

Notice it says, “he made his disciples get into the boat”. We might wonder if they argued about it.

Perhaps they thought they should help to send the crowds away, but Jesus saw that they needed to compare notes on their mission trips.

Or perhaps they were behaving like the crowds and refusing to give Jesus the space he needed to pray.

Most of us are not plagued by screaming fans or followed by crowds begging us to heal sick people.

Nonetheless, there are people with many needs in society today. Some need feeding or healing.

Others are looking for the direction that a life of faith can provide. And many Churches are busy running food banks, providing support and teaching the faith.

But Christians also need to spend time together, to reflect on our experiences, to learn from each other and above all to spend time with God.

“And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves.” Mark 6:32

Please share your response to this reflection to Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God’ spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

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