

## Contexts

### Mark's Gospel

- Composed between 65-70 CE
- Generally accepted as the first Gospel written.
- Authorship is unclear but possibly written by John Mark, the companion of Peter in Rome.
- Begins with the ministry of John the Baptist in the wilderness, then the Baptism of Jesus, then Jesus battling the forces of evil in the wilderness.
- First action of Jesus is to establish a community to establish the kingdom of God.
- Major work of this community is the work of healing and restoring God's right order, as opposed to the order of Rome, or the order established by the scribes and Pharisees, or religious and cultural norms of the time.
- Cleansing & healing stories restore people to their proper (rightful) place in the Kingdom and in human society (no longer outcasts, despised, unclean, etc).
- The right order of God's kingdom shatters and goes beyond the human and religious limitations placed on some of God's beloved sons and daughters.
- There is a characteristic starkness in Mark's Gospel – it is the shortest of the 4 canonical Gospels.
- Often the story is told by contrast – who is truly blind: the blind beggar or the seeing disciples, etc.

### Mark 6:30-34 – things to notice

- Last Sunday's Gospel reading was about the mission of Jesus and the twelve in and around Galilee. Jesus sends the twelve out to preach and to heal. This Sunday the disciples return and report to Jesus all that 'they had done and taught'.
- However, this section is actually the introduction to the story of Jesus' feeding the five thousand. It is 'setting the scene' – but the account of this story next Sunday will come from John's Gospel, not Mark.
- Jesus recognises the apostles' need for rest – both as a result of their missionary journeys and because of the number of people now flocking around Jesus and the twelve.
- Jesus invites them 'come away to a lonely (solitary) place' – means a place where they could be alone.
- They get into a boat and go to this place.
- BUT, the crowd guesses where Jesus and the twelve are heading and beat them to it on foot(!)
- The unexpected presence of the crowd (and Jesus and the twelve bringing only enough food for themselves) set up the circumstances for the feeding of a large crowd in an isolated place).
- 'Like sheep without a shepherd' – Jesus is moved by compassion for the crowd and sets about to 'feed' the crowd by his teaching. (The feeding with fish and bread will come next in Mark, but we don't get to read that section).
- So, Jesus is moved with compassion for the needy humans (both the 12 and the crowd).
- While insisting that the 12 rest, Jesus himself goes on working (teaching), feeding hearts with his teaching (and bodies with fish and bread). That seems to present Jesus very much as the ideal shepherd spoken of by Jeremiah in the first reading.
- There are implications here for modern-day disciples.

## The Liturgical Context – why does the church choose this passage to reflect on this Sunday ?

In the first reading the prophet Jeremiah laments the poor leadership given by those to whom the flock of God has been entrusted. He tells of the days to come when God will raise up true shepherds look after the flock and pasture (feed) them. The reading also looks forward to a true shepherd-king from the House of David who will act with wisdom, honesty and integrity to look after the people. He will 'save Judah' and will be called: The Lord, our integrity.

In the Gospel Mark shows Jesus to be a true shepherd whose heart is moved by the needs of both the people and his own disciples. The disciples have returned from their preaching and tell Jesus everything that happened to them. These exhausted shepherds are weary but the people keep coming to them, so much so that they had no time even to eat.

Jesus, moved by compassion for them, invites them to a place of quiet and rest, but the people guess where they are going and follow them. Instead of sending the people away, Jesus himself sets about teaching them. He feeds the people with the Word of God.

In the Gospel next Sunday Jesus will feed the people with the loaves and fish. Like a true shepherd Jesus looks after all the needs and hungers of his flock – feeding hearts as well as bodies. It is a very grounded approach that Jesus offers. It does not ignore either spiritual or physical hungers and needs. As followers of Christ, we, too, try to be people who meet the real hungers and needs of our brothers and sisters and all entrusted to our care.