

Good morning everyone,

The theme of our worship this coming Sunday (Seventh Sunday after Trinity) provides the inspiration for all Christian life and ministry. It is how we are called to be one people in Christ, with a spirit of care, compassion and inclusion. The message is simple, but the reality is often more complicated. It calls much of the world to a radical (rooted in God) refocusing of life following the pattern set by Jesus.

Jeremiah 23: 1 – 6

The historical context of the book of Jeremiah covers the period and events leading up to and following the siege and capture of Jerusalem by the Babylonians and the deportation of many of its inhabitants to years of exile in Babylon (597BC). Jeremiah himself is a symbol of the agonies of the loyal Israelites as opposed to those whose infidelity to God's covenant with them had brought conquest and exile upon themselves.

The shepherds referred to at the beginning of today's passage are the sinful kings of Judah whose behaviour has particularly led to the nation's misfortune. But the overall message here is one of hope. God will redeem his people in the end. There will be a righteous king of the house of David who will be a true shepherd to the people, a people restored to their own land. It is not clear who Jeremiah is referring to. He appears to be repeating the hopes of his predecessors for the restoration of the Davidic monarchy which would be faithful to God's covenant with his people, and which would restore its religious and moral obligations for the people. We can see how Christians came to see this as a prophecy of Jesus, for in him many saw the shepherding leadership that Israel had been lacking for centuries. He did not, of course, become 'king of Israel,' but hopefully, his kind of kingship and kingdom reigns in the hearts and lives of all who follow him, and by God's grace will one day rule the world.

Ephesians 2: 11 – 22

The writer explains how the cross of Christ has destroyed the division between Jew and Gentile and has created a new humanity which is different from both groups and is open to all. This is a huge message of hope and encouragement in a divided social and religious world, and it remains relevant today. Union with Christ means the end of all humanly created divisions. There are no longer foreigners or aliens within the Church, and no more social or ethnic barriers. We are a new creation in Christ, a dwelling place for God in the Spirit.

Mark 6: 30 – 34 & 53 – 56

Today's Gospel gives us two scenes from Jesus' ministry which are sandwiched by the story of the feeding of the five thousand. That episode and its impact will be covered over the next four Sundays in the more detailed and in-depth exploration from the Gospel of John. Today we see something deep about Jesus – his attractive character, his immense compassion, and his power to heal people, all of which drew huge crowds to see him and to be ministered to by him. Jesus has sympathy with them for they are 'like sheep without a shepherd,' rather like the leaderless people of Israel in Jeremiah's time. He appears as a true shepherd of the people, ministering to every need and touching every part of people's lives. We see in Jesus a huge ministry of welcome and acceptance, of inclusion and care. How well

does the Church and its ministry, in which we all share, live and work according to the example of the Master?

Collect for the Seventh Sunday after Trinity:

Lord of all power and might, the author and giver of all good things: graft in our hearts the love of your name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of your great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Every blessing for Sunday and the coming week,

Love and prayers,

John