

Sermon – Trinity 7, Sunday 18 July 2021 FHC @ Centre

Mark 6:30-34, 53-end Making time for Jesus



Last Sunday, the England team were on a mission and it felt like the whole nation was following the Euro 2020 Football Final between England v Italy.

As it went to penalties, down our street we could hear the cheers and euphoria as well as the groans and more colourful words of disappointment. Like the England team, the disciples we come across in our Gospel reading today had also been on a mission. And like the England team, they had acquitted themselves well, despite it all not going their way. So when the disciples return home to Jesus in Mark 6:30 some are raring to continue, others are dejected. We get a glimpse into just how busy ministry was for them *'for many were coming and going, and had no leisure even to eat'* (V31). But like trying to start the car at the end of the first COVID lockdown only to find the battery is flat, all of them needed a recharge. So in v31 Jesus said to them *'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves*

and rest a while.' There are a couple of things this passage of scripture provokes us to reflect on. Here's the first: we need to *plan time to take time with Jesus*. When Corinna and I first had children we were both working full time as well as bringing up a young family. It was hard enough to plan time with each other, let alone with God. And so the weekends became even more precious as we sought to carve out some space. In the rush of our daily routes, we needed to find space for time alone with God. So my prayer time became the 1.5 hour commute to Swindon in the morning and hers became last thing at night using a reading plan from the Bible App. Over the last 18 months, we've all been through the pandemic together, and at last restrictions are easing. But it's easy to underestimate the toll it has taken on family relationships, our mental wellbeing, our psychological stamina. With COVID, we're more used to spotting outward physical symptoms. But there are also non-physical consequences that all of us bear: the absence of family and friends; living in isolation; processing the loss of loved ones; curbs on our freedom which prevent us doing those things which re-charge our batteries. Jesus is effectively telling his followers to take a break, take some time out with him. We all need to find our 'deserted place' for recharging, reflection and refocusing ourselves, in God's company. Like taking a sighting when you're out on a long walk, these are times to re-orient ourselves in God's direction. How are you doing that this Summer?

Onto our second point. Robert Burns once wrote *'the best laid plans of mice and men gang oft awry'* meaning that even great

planning is at the mercy of the unforeseen or unintended. Jesus' and his followers' plans for a break go awry: *'And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognised them, and they hurried there on foot from all the town and arrived ahead of them'* (V32,33). The crowds anticipate where Jesus is going and rush there on foot, meeting the boat on the other side of the shore when it arrives. So they don't immediately get the break they wanted. What's Jesus reaction? Disappointment? Anger? No. *'He saw the people were like sheep without a shepherd and had compassion on them'*(v34). Jesus sees that the crowd following them also need restoration and redemption. They were desperate to touch even the hem of his garment. How does Jesus have compassion on them? The Bible reading extract for this Sunday misses out v35-52 so we don't immediately realise. What happens next is the feeding of the 5000 and Jesus walking on water. Despite these seeming interruptions and diversions, Jesus' approach to ministry is not to resent the interruption, but to see it as an opportunity for ministry. People are the reason Jesus came to be with us. So the second point is simply this: God can bring good out of things even though our best laid plans have gone awry, just as much as can when things do go our way. And this gives us hope and courage as we emerge from the pandemic, in the busy-ness of family life, in our jobs or employment or schools or retirement.

The final point is a challenge to us: I don't know whether you like modern art and know Tracey Emin? I'm told that in a wine bar near Bristol in Portishead on the wall is an arrow pointing to

a splattered stain and the words by the arrow say *'Tracey Emin spilt her wine here and we dare not clean it off in case it isart'*. A passionate follower of Tracey Emin may be prepared to pay a good sum for it! Back to the football - an army of followers turned up at Wembley, 60,000 in total. In an age where everyone is looking for followers or following someone, whether that is on Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Tik Tok etc, who are we following? Whom are we letting influence and shape us, our behaviour, our aspirations? As we take time out this Summer, let's pause from everyone else we're following and create space for hearing God's voice, re-orient ourselves towards him and recharge our physical, mental and spiritual batteries. It often those times when we're at rest that we create the space for God to speak to us, as our mind turns to processing events and we reflect on what's been going on and God gives us the strength, joy and peace to continue to follow him. Amen.

