

Sermon 7th Sunday after Trinity

16th in Ordinary

Jeremiah 23.1-6, Ephesians 2.13-18, Mark 6:30-34

Practical Pity – Divine Action

Pity is a common part of what it is to be human. We will have looked upon many situations this last couple of weeks and felt it. We will have looked with pity upon those poor people in Germany and the low countries whose houses and livelihoods have been swept away in flood, we will have looked with pity upon that delightful young lad Bukayo Saka being asked to take the crucial penalty for England in the Euro final and missing, we will regard the ordinary folk of Afghanistan with profound pity as they are abandoned to another cycle of civil strife and power struggle between those who seem to have no pity. If we have no pity we seem less than human.

The word for compassion or pity that is at the heart of our little gospel today includes **gut** – Jesus gazes upon the people and has pity or compassion that he feels in the gut – it's not just an attitude of mind but visceral. Sheep without a shepherd is shorthand rooted in the Old Testament, for the absence of Godly kingship, governance, leadership and guidance that marks the needs of the people first and itself second. Such absence and its consequences is felt in the gut of God.

Yes we may have pity but what does it move us to do? During this last year or so we have seen fine examples nationally and locally of people moved with pity to do something. It is always better to light one candle than to just sit in the dark. However, no effort no action however laudable and seemingly successful eradicates the need for pity. Darkness is always pressing in, there will always be another situation in this world to move us to pity and compassion. To think otherwise is delusional yet to become inured, hardened, cynical is to become pitiless and dehumanised. We can see such deliberate dehumanisation at work in totalitarian regimes and merciless theocracies. We can see it in racial, cultural and other forms of abuse and in the lives of those we might call psychopathically dehumanised to the plight of others. All these hold some are not worthy of pity or care or less than others.

At the heart of our Faith is Divine pity, empathy, compassion for all. These things are at the heart of God – they are at the heart of Jesus. It is untiring – note in the gospel how they needed a rest were trying to get away; they'd had a busy time and the news of John the Baptist's death must have been an arrow to the heart. Jesus is not compassioned out. God is unchanging and eternal; the tiredness of the Son does not squash his pity. He is the action the practical demonstration of Gods pity because he is always fully human and divine. There is no dehumanising. Our response should not be self-pity that we are so inadequate by comparison but rather thankfulness that God's pity is not exhausted nor is it partial to one or another.

The heart of this chapter of St.Mark today is the feeding of the 5000 and Jesus walking on the water but the Church has chosen in her wisdom simply to offer this little glimpse into the pity of the true shepherd for his flock. He will not change even when the flock have turned on him and put him to death: *Father forgive them for they know not what they do*. What pity and compassion? It is offered not just for those who suffer from flood, those set up to fail, or those who are misruled cruelly, but for those who treat creation as a possession for exploitation, those who prey on others failures and those who see people as step ladders for their own elevation.

God in Jesus has pity on sinned against and upon sinners, though the action and word may be different for each person group and occasion. All of us at different times will find ourselves on both sides of that reason for his pity. This is the source of our greatest thanksgiving and call to action. The Incarnation of God in Christ is practical divine pity in action that his image may be restored when there is no need for pity, no darkness that presses in.

All this shapes the flow of the mass from confession to thanksgiving and then to dismissal into the world. We come as we are, we encounter the pity of God in the word made flesh. We are humbled or lifted in due measure, and fed in our hunger and tiredness. We give thanks and are ourselves moved in the gut to go out and do likewise. In this simple action we are assured of God's love in action - the Divine and eternal pity shown fully on the cross.