

The gospel for this Sunday tells us what happened after the disciples came back from their preaching mission – they were sent out in last week’s gospel to preach repentance.

They come back completely exhausted – they have put everything into it and have no more to give. So Jesus tells them they need a rest – let’s go away to a quiet place. But we see that the people will give them no rest, they are so eager to hear the gospel, that they tried to follow them. So when they get to the lonely place, they meet a large crowd.

But Jesus didn’t send them away – he knew what they needed – they were like sheep without a shepherd. What are sheep without a shepherd like? Lost, disorientated, running in this direction and that, not knowing where to go – running away scared. What they needed was firm direction and purpose, and Jesus in his teaching gave them to them – he took pity on them, and showed them the deep love and compassion of God, as he explained to them what life was really all about. He fed them with his words, that they needed so badly.

These days we don’t have hundreds of people flocking to our doors, eager to hear the words of Jesus. But those

words are as true today as they have even been. People today are like sheep without a shepherd.

The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want – those are such famous words, such a famous psalm, but what do they mean? WE are in danger of sentimentalising the lovely images so that we forget the real message - I have everything I need if I have the Lord as my shepherd. Or we could say without the Lord we don’t have what we really need. Our lives are wanting, they lack that essential thing, which is the love and compassion of God. It’s the same message as the gospel.

Our world today, seemingly lost and lacking in real purpose as it is, needs this same comforting love, reassurance and teaching of Jesus; many long for healing and wholeness, many search for happiness and purpose, and are looking in the wrong place, for it is only to be found in Jesus, Son of God and Saviour of the world. He loves us, he is deeply concerned for our well-being, and longs to draw all those lost souls back to himself.

But how you may ask? How will the lost find what they really need? The church is here to meet that need by offering people the Gospel of Jesus and the Sacraments.

We are here, our churches are here, in every community there is a church which people can come to, where they can find what they need, but we don't have people flocking to our doors as they flocked to Jesus. Only a few come. Why?

Many won't listen, or don't understand, or they don't believe that they are lost. They think they are fine without the Lord. Or they have been hurt in some way by someone in the church or the church has not done enough to look for them. Or its let them down in a big way with scandal and self interest. And on top of all that we have CoVID.

We need to find ways of reaching out to all these people. Once again, the call to evangelisation is there. A call to find all those lost sheep who are without a shepherd. To offer them that spiritual nourishment so that they will find God and his salvation, so that they know the words of the psalm are true for them :

“The Lord is my shepherd – I have everything I need.”

That the only one we really need in the end is Jesus and his words of life.