

In the cool of this church we find rest from the heat. We've just heard one of our most oft quoted psalms – The Lord is My Shepherd – with 'Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of deep darkness (or death) I fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me,' to use the Revised Standard Version, or the Really Safe Version as some say, but which highlights our forever situation as creatures always in danger of death. On Monday, we're being invited to ignore this reality to some degree – to kid ourselves that we now have greater freedom in respect of Covid – double-jabbed and ready for everything – except, that is, the ill and the vulnerable and the unvaccinated, which is still, of course, not only true of many here in this country but of the rest of the world. In the past, we might have castigated religious figures who ignored the science but today it's a secular figure ignoring our religious need – that is our need to love and care for one another as the shepherd cares for his flock. So Jeremiah's warning about the dire quality of the leaders of his day is also a perennial one, as also is its search for a saviour figure – one with integrity. And this is what the people are seeking in today's gospel passage as they rush from one shore to another of the Sea of Galilee: someone who cares for them at whatever cost. And it's a great learning episode for his disciples who've been out preaching and teaching and healing and are now in need of rest, and are expecting it as Jesus is expecting time with them, too, far away from the crowds and their neediness. And the lesson for the disciples and, perhaps for Jesus, is that compassion trumps everything and that although we might think of ourselves as spent and exhausted and in need of recuperation, God's grace trumps everything, too. So, instead of turning the crowds away, Jesus sets out to teach them – plugging in to God's inexhaustible love, one might say, in order to do so. This may have surprised himself as much as his disciples, we don't know, but it exemplifies that 'going the extra mile' that characterises God's love. That love which will carry Christ, which will carry God, to the cross itself. Of course there is a need for rest, but God will take care of that, often in surprising ways, and assuredly through the agency of one another: that mutual love and obedience so often stressed in the Rule of St Benedict so that no one has a cause for grumbling.

Stepping into this flow of God's love will be exemplified next week in the feeding of this crowd at the end of the day which ends with Jesus escaping back to the hills to be by himself. So there is a time for ministry and a time for rest and this is exemplified for us here in the coolness of this church and the contrast with the heat outside and the warning of the peril now facing all of us because of the change in climate we have brought on ourselves with Covid but a stalking horse for this much greater danger, and a reminder of our perennial need for salvation, for a saviour-figure that is, who will provide comfort for us in this valley of the shadow of death.

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