

## Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

**Sermon Text:** Mark 6:30-34

**Theme:** “*A Shepherd for God’s flock*”

Grace, peace and mercy to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

The first part of today’s gospel reading is the introduction to the miraculous feeding of the 5,000 by Jesus. This wonderful story can distract us from the depth of God’s love for us which is enacted through Christ’s words that come immediately prior to the physical feeding of God’s people.

Listen once more to Jesus’ response to the crowd who had gathered to hear him speak and to perform more miracles. “When Jesus went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like a sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things” (Mk 6:34).

Heavenly Father, sanctify us in the truth, your Word is truth. Amen.

### **Shepherds who fail God’s flock**

Trusting that God’s Word speaks for us today as the living Word, I want to share with you an incident that occurred in our church in South Australia in April of this year. Many of the details are still unknown but what has been reported by the Adelaide media is that on a Christian youth camp organised by the Lutheran Church, a 15 year old boy was physically restrained and it seems some form of exorcism was attempted. Apparently this boy complained of stomach pains and was allegedly restrained by an off-duty policeman who was serving as a camp leader. A number of others were also involved. When advised, the South Australian District President notified the police and an investigation is ongoing. I encourage you to pray for all those who are involved, especially the boy and his parents.

I have no intention of speculating further about the events that surrounded this event but I would like to comment on an observation by the President of our church, Pastor Mike Semmler. On his most recent ‘President’s Page’ which is on the LCA website, he refers briefly to this incident and makes the point that ‘no pastor of the Church has been shown to be directly involved’.

It is at this point the current events of our church are informed by God’s Word. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God speaks very strongly, “Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!” Then directly to the shepherds God says, “You have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds.” Who are these shepherds that God is speaking so strongly against?

In the first instance, God is speaking against the kings who sit on David’s throne. These are the leaders who have been anointed as shepherds of God’s flock. As David was a shepherd of sheep, so too the kings that follow him were to be the ones who would lead and guide the people of God’s flock. They were to lead the people in worship of the one true God. They were supposed to execute justice in the morning and they were to deliver from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed (Jer 21:12-13). These shepherds, these rulers of God’s people were supposed to look after them by being just and fair. But instead of leading the Israelites in proper worship of God, they were guilty of worshipping false idols. God’s anointed kings were just as sinful as the people and so they fail the people and they fail God.

While many of our political leaders today may not see themselves as ruling by God’s authority, this is in fact what they are doing. Our leaders are to be God’s instruments of peace that enable us to live and worship in peace. We recognise when this happens, but we also see when leaders fail the people by serving contrary to the Word of God.

We have spoken about the political rulers. Does this word of prophecy also apply to our church leaders? Surely the answer must be ‘Yes’. If our society is moving further and further away from being guided by God’s Word, now is the time for our church to be leading and guiding our communities. *Not* through political agendas, but by being led ourselves by God’s Word which calls us to be faithful to God and to live according to his will.

It is for this reason we ought to be asking whether we as a church are being led by God, or are we being led by the culture of our society? Remember the words of our President concerning the leadership of the youth camp in South Australia. “No pastor of the church has been shown to be directly involved.” I’m sure these words were meant as a comfort – “Don’t worry folks, whilst this situation isn’t good, at least none of our pastors have been involved in such a bad event.” The question now should be, “Why not!” Why weren’t the pastors of our church involved in a youth camp organised by our church for the young people of our church?

I’m not suggesting that pastors need to be, or indeed should be running all the activities of the church. Surely we are mature enough now that we can draw on the many skills and abilities of all members of our church to fill the many roles God gives us as a church. But how did we get to the point that we don’t have the pastors involved in a major youth event? Why was the only pastor in attendance from another denomination? How did we allow the transition from a boy having stomach pains to an alleged exorcism take place. Why wasn’t spiritual guidance sort from our church leadership?

Well might we ask these questions of our national church but how does our own district fare? We promote various youth events such as ‘Christian Life Week’, but are we also guilty of neglecting spiritual and pastoral oversight? And let’s not be shy about looking into our own backyard.

What would be the answer if we asked about the pastoral oversight for the youth group each Friday evening in our church? I know the answer and as I reflect on the events in South Australia, I know the care of the spiritual well being of our young people has been handed over to someone else. Not delegated but handed over. This is not to say that person isn’t doing a good job. In fact I have every confidence they are doing a *great* job. The point is however, I don’t *know* the answer. This should be a concern for you as it is now a concern for me. So concerned am I for failing to lead our young people with appropriate spiritual care, I ask for your forgiveness – I mean to do better.

### **The Good Shepherd**

Friends in Christ, at this point we might gnash our teeth and lament the state of our political and church leaders, but here is the sad truth. No matter how hard we try, we will always fall short of each other’s expectations and we will most certainly fail God’s standard of perfection. The good news for you today is that God understands our weaknesses and failings. It is for this reason he sent Jesus as a branch from the stump of David. Jesus is our good shepherd and we are all the sheep of his pasture. From the tumult and trials of this world, Jesus leads us beside still waters, bringing his peace and his grace gifts.

And the wonderful news for all of you who would be leaders, leaders of your children, your students, your workers, your community, Jesus died the punishment for all of the shepherds who have failed his people in the past and who continue to struggle today. Listen to God’s Word and continue to follow Jesus as you lead others to know of his love for the world.

The gospel reading records the twelve disciples who have come back to Jesus after he had sent them out to call people to repent and receive the good news. After they share their stories with Jesus, he said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while” (Mk 6:31). Jesus recognised that the disciples needed some solitude and rest away from the rush of people so they could be restored by God. What a blessing to hear such news in our world of busyness today. How often do we retreat from our daily work, only to rush headlong into some other form of activity? We can easily become so busy during our time of rest, it can be a relief to slip back into our normal routine of rush!

Now even though Jesus had plans for giving his disciples a time of rest, the crowds saw which way they were heading and they went on ahead of them. This was not to be that time of rest and while we too might plan time for rest and family, things may quickly change and the work has to be done. This shouldn’t be used as an excuse for never taking time away from work for soon everyone hurts, especially your closest family.

When Jesus saw those crowds gathered, he had compassion on them and he begins to teach them for they had been too long without a shepherd. So often we jump to the miraculous feeding of the 5,000

with just five loaves and two fish, but we can forget that before Jesus feed their physical needs, he addresses their spiritual needs by teaching them. Jesus the Good shepherd feeds his people, his sheep, from the rich pastures of his everlasting word.

### **There's work to be done**

Jesus feeds you with the bread of life which is his body and this is filled with his Spirit which comes through his word. The Good Shepherd leads you as he calls each one of you by name to both rest and to do the work that God has called you to. This work will look different for each of you but with Jesus leading you, you may be certain that it is pleasing to God as it builds up the body of Christ in the world today.

Many of the Israelites kings failed God and the people, not because they weren't good leaders or they couldn't win a war. They failed because they didn't put their trust in God alone to lead them. God is calling you each and every day to serve him by serving those people around you. As Jesus is the Good Shepherd, he calls you to be his undershepherds as you serve as his hands, feet, ears and eyes in the world today. Whether God calls you to be a parent, or a teacher, or a student, or friend, Jesus is leading you through his word and filling you with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Our church is wrestling with difficult issues at present. This is nothing new but may serve as a timely reminder to repent of our sins and turn back to God for him to lead us as we pass the true faith on to a new generation. Jesus remains your Good Shepherd, follow the sure sound of his voice given to you through his Word.

And may the peace of God which passes all understanding keep guard over your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.