

16th Sunday of the Year (B)

July 22, 2018

Jeremiah 23:1-6
Ephesians 2:13-18
Mark 6:30-34

Making connections is what it is all about, bringing people together to talk, to support one another, to provide something that will ease the suffering and pain. The rescue of the Thai soccer team and their coach brought the world together in such a way that was indeed phenomenal. To a great extent we each felt the sadness as the days past and little progress was being made. The world community came together as it seldom does, because we could feel for the young folks trapped underground, hungry and scared to death. Regardless of national boundaries, rescuers came together and shared their expertise. The world community came together, assisted one another, and experienced humanity as it is supposed to be. And there was one who gave his life that those trapped under ground might have life. I would like to say, this awakening of the human spirit is our hope, that we might become more connected to one another.

One of the things we find in God's personality, clearly revealed in Jesus is the incredible care God has for all creation. God longs to care for people, to shepherd them. Jesus clearly explains to us in the scriptures that the role of shepherding has everything to do with a certain way of knowing someone. Jesus describes himself as a shepherd who knows his sheep. And the sheep also know him. This is real shepherding, effective shepherding—taking care of people. We have far too many examples in this world how shepherding is not there, or how it simply misses the mark of bringing people together. I have found myself quite often in situations where I am trying to do something for someone—and the advice I am giving has absolutely no connection to what the person is experiencing. This insight is pretty important in any helping profession, because then, together with that individual we search for that place of connection. Most often what people want to know is that you care and that you wish to make some connection with them.

The gospel accounts describe Jesus as the one who comes into the world and really understands. He really knows the experience people are going through. He respects people's experiences. More often than not, he takes them one by one, not in groups. He somehow enters into their world and is able to preach a word that brings life. This is good shepherding. Last week, we saw Jesus sending his disciples out to preach and proclaim the word of God. Another way of imaging this is that Jesus was sending the disciples out to be shepherds. Jesus asked them to do some extraordinary things, to make a connection. He did not say, "Go and speak a few comforting words. Make sure they have a little food. Give them a couple of catechism lessons, a little scripture." Rather he said, "I want you to go into their lives, into their cities, into their places, and expel demons. Free people from leprosy. Heal all who are sick. And raise the dead. This is pretty awesome, to walk into people's lives and raise them from the dead. The command to the disciples was that they might shepherd the people from death to faith, hope, and love.

In today's lesson, the disciples have returned and they must have had stories to tell. Most likely, they were a mixture of success stories and stories of failure—people accepting them and

rejecting them. Realizing that they must be tired and that they need to rest, Jesus takes them to a quiet, out-of-the-way place, only to realize the need was greater than expected. And here we come upon the real teachable moment for the disciples. Jesus saw the people looking for him and “his heart was move with pity.” This word for pity means that Jesus was touched deep within, like the feeling of parents who see their child in real pain. The people’s hunger, their heartfelt search, and their longing for something more, called Jesus forth. He allowed their need to turn him, more and more, into a shepherd.

This is the lesson Jesus taught the disciples. Beyond anything words could explain, the disciples saw how he identified with the the people that appeared before him. Jesus was showing his followers that if they wanted to carry forth his mission, they had to let themselves enter into the lives of the people.

Pope Francis explains in the Joy of the Gospel: “An evangelizing community gets involved in people’s family lives, it bridges differences and is even willing to abase itself if necessary (EG #24). He puts the call clearly when he says, “I hope that all communities will devote the necessary effort to advancing along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are” (eg #26). Gandhi said, “Be the change you wish to see in the world.”

We come here and we are gathered in as the flock of the Lord. The shepherd nourishes us with the sacred word and the gift of Eucharist. And we go out the door into a new week, not to simply be the sheep but to follow his example and become the shepherds our world needs.