

“The Lord is our Shepherd,
we shall not be in want.” AMEN!

Our gospel today is a bit odd.

Not odd because of the story or its context
but the fact that it leaves out a section of
verses from chapter 6.

In between what was read today are
the two very familiar miracles:
the feeding of the 5000 and
Jesus’ walking on water.

For whatever reason the organizers of
the lectionary chose to leave out
these specific miracles.

One reason that the feeding was left out
might be because next week we will
hear the account on the
miraculous feeding told in
the Gospel of John and

then the next three Sundays after that
we dive deeper and deeper into Christ,
and the image that He is the bread of life.

No doubt we will be “full” with
so much bread metaphor in the coming weeks!

But, then why leave out
the miraculous walk on water?

I think the answer is because we’d
focus only on that and ignore the
specific parts of the text lifted up today.

So, like good detectives we discern and
calculate what the message is for us
in the scriptures that are given?

And like good Bible scholars,
we take notice of what came right
before our assigned reading.

And we find that was our reading from last week.

The text of terror that told of
John the baptizer’s execution at
the banquet of Herod Antipas.

Old Herod Antipas loved to listen
to John the baptizer preach.

Some argue that he may have even
protected John for a while, until
he was enamored and revoltingly
aroused by his step-daughter's dancing
at the banquet,

and Antipas forgot himself when he promised
her he'd grant any wish.

Perhaps he thought she'd ask for money or
elevated status, who knows?

But, instead (with the help from her mother)
she asked for the head of John the baptizer
on a platter.

True, Herod Antipas had been tricked, but at
this crucial moment, he could have
gone back on his promise.

He could have said, "The wish
you ask for is forbidden."

Executing John was not just, nor was it ethical,
but his mind told him that he had
a political base that he needed to keep.

His mind told him that John's life

was not as important as doing the right thing.

Herod Antipas decided to ignore the truth
and keep his base supporters securely
in his corner.

His base that wanted every oath, even if
it was a promise based on lies,
promiscuity and deception to be honored
even the unethical ones.

Herod Antipas had a choice;
he was free to make a decision.

Protect his own honor and keep
his political base happy or
do the right thing.

We all know what his decision was and
he is remembered today as a leader who let
the multitudes of people down.

Multitudes of people who counted on him
to act and behave and govern, justly.

His decision is a common example of
poor leadership. (Pause)

If Herod Antipas' actions are an
example of bad leadership then where is
the example of good leadership.

They are found in today's scripture
and there's more than one example, really.

We are told that Jesus wanted to bring
the disciples with him
to a deserted place to rest.

You may have noticed that Mark even calls
them apostles in verse 30.

They are still students (disciples) of Jesus but
they had been sent out a little earlier in
chapter 6 and that makes them apostles.

They went out two by two to proclaim
that people can turn away from
selfishness, slander, greed, and hate

They went and cast out many demons and
healed many people.

It sounds like they were a huge success!
There is no reason to think otherwise...

Unless we remember reality!

Even though the text does not say so, we
can surely recognize that they encounter
difficult times.

We had better believe that they
were challenged, ignored, and scorned.

Doors were slammed in their faces and
they were called names and thrown out
of villages and that can take a
toll on a person.

Jesus advised them to let such occasions
roll off their backs or “be shaken off like dust”
that is on the feet,

but they are human and it hurts
when one comes with news of hope
and love from God, and then
receive rejection and slander.

So what did Jesus do?

First of all, he recognized
their exhaustion and called
for a retreat.

A withdrawal to a place of seclusion
to re-charge and to be filled.

This is one example of what good leaders do.

They allow for people to have time
for rest and renewal.

I worry often about the doers and
shakers of this church.

Those who do so much and are often
willing to even take on more responsibility
when it is offered.

I worry because it can lead to burnout.

It happens to clergy, teachers,
social workers, nurses, to people
that walk with others through grief and
it happens to volunteers who
love their church.

Today we hear about good
leadership from Jesus,
contrary to Antipas' leadership.

Jesus cares for people and will
never do anything to hurt or separate them.

Not only for the apostles but for those multitudes
who followed them even when Jesus
and the apostles needed rest. (Pause)

Here we have yet another
example of good leadership.

Jesus reveals to us that his is
not a closed society.

Good leaders let others in.

Could Jesus have told these “lost sheep”
that followed them when they needed rest
to go away?

Sure, he could have.

We would have even found that
to be a positive trait for caring people
need rest and retreat.

But, he didn't because he had
compassion for them, too.

An endless amount of compassion is
revealed in Jesus because he recognized
when sheep do not have a Shepherd.

He gave them food and care,
and inspired the disciples to do the same
thing.

As they gathered around Jesus,
so did others desire to
gather around Jesus, and they were
not turned away.

Good leaders have compassion
and they inspire others to
have compassion, too. (Pause)

Good leaders liberate people to act
accordingly to restore people's dignity and trust.

The quality of leadership that
the prophets had in mind was
to empower people and give them
an eye and ear to find hope.

Prophetic voices are not about beating
people down and warning them of
God's judgment only.

Truly prophetic voices always restore hope.

It is not only about listening to
the complaints of people but having a
deep concern about the dangers
that fester inside us.

These dangers that fester have to do with
our nation, the direct community around us,
our congregation and our families.

If we know these festering dangers
then we know there is hope that healing is
soon to come. (Pause)

So, what does that mean for us?

It means we try to get away to quiet places.
To go wilderness spots, if we are able
and be ready to find God there.

It means we come to this place on Sunday,
or anytime to receive renewal.

To go into the courtyard and sit by the fountain
and meditate on the three crosses artwork.

To light a candle in a quiet corner of
your living space and give yourself over to
this God who desires to rest you. (Pause)

This leads us to the second part of
the gospel from Mark.

When they returned from the retreat with Jesus,
the people came rushed up to be near him.

In fact, wherever Jesus went people
recognized him and were drawn to Him
like metal to a magnet,
moths to a flame and
sheep to a Shepherd.

Jesus was magnetic, he still is, not just
because he provided healing but because
he restores people.

Christ restores us so that we can
restore our families, community, and
even the nation.

Even a touch of his cloak fringe healed
and restored people.

To know what he did, helps us to know

what we are to do.

Jesus was the right person for the job and
so is each and every one of you.

You're the right person for the job.

Come to Jesus and never minimize
the positive influence that you have.

And there, there we will find
a true miracle for the world.

AMEN!