

Jesus 'got into the boat' we heard in today's Gospel passage. Inevitably part of the tour of the Galilee was a boat trip on the Sea of Galilee. Prior to that excursion we went to a museum on a kibbutz where there is a single exhibit. It was carefully hoisted from the waters of the Lake wrapped in fibreglass as its wood began to corrode to dust when it met the air. It had been discovered by two brothers from the kibbutz Ginosar in the mid 1980's who were walking near the lake searching for coins or other ancient memorabilia. They saw curved shafts of wood sticking up from the much receded waters. There was a severe drought and the Lake was at its lowest ebb in memory. An archaeologist was called and the race to preserve the boat began. It was made by a master craftsman but from, it seems, any suitable wood that was to hand. Apart from cedar planking and oak frames five other types of wood were identified. The vessel showed much evidence of many repairs. Finally when further patchings up were not possible the mast was removed and it was pushed out in the deep to sink. It has been dated to between 120 BCE and 40 CE. It is then the sort of boat Jesus and Peter and Andrew, James and John would have been familiar with. It was just over eight metres long and over two metres wide. Suitable for both rowing and sailing, it would have been crewed by five men and could carry five more. It is the only ancient boat ever found from the Sea of Galilee.

The Lake appears placid most of the time but this can be deceptive. Air currents mixing as the seasons change can whip up a storm without warning. Just as appears to have happened in the tragedy in Missouri before the weekend. The sailors then required great skill to avoid disaster, as the Gospels report. Jesus' authority to still the storm and calm the winds is a clear statement that he shares God's power.

The predominant image of today's readings is not sailing but shepherding. Jeremiah castigates the shepherds, an image for the leaders of the people, who are not looking after the flock but have allowed the sheep to be destroyed and scattered. God himself will bring them back to their pastures, and provide proper pastors to care for them.

The same image is powerfully repeated in today's psalm. The Lord is my shepherd, sings the psalmist. He provides everything I need: grass lands for food, fresh, reviving water, good safe leadership, and protection.

The image then changes, and with it a change in the sex of the one who is doing the caring. A banquet is prepared which was a female, maternal task. The sheep is now a welcome guest who is anointed with to smell fragrant, not like a sheep, yet like the sheep, its needs are met, now with fine food and abundant wine. This is all provided 'in the sight of my foes'. This may mean that the enemy, the one who desires to do harm, is thwarted. Or it might mean that the enemy is reconciled. The image of breaking and sharing bread is a symbol of reconciliation. One shares food with a friend. The Bedouin, the desert people, even guaranteeing the guests safety when a

meal has been shared.

The second reading from the Letter to the Ephesians speaks of Christ restoring peace through the cross, killing hostility. Christ, our Good Shepherd and our food is the means by which we are reconciled with God and with one another.

Jesus' plans are unrealised in the Gospel passage. He intends his disciples to have time to chill but instead work appears on the horizon as soon as the boat touches the shore. We will later learn that there are five thousand men in the crowd, not to mention women and children. Instead of relaxing there is no time even to eat. Jesus will feed the crowds spiritually with his teaching, and then feed their stomachs, with a sit down meal from five loaves and two fish.

That story and its aftermath we will be listening to over the next several weeks but from John's Gospel.

Jesus feels sorry for the crowd who are 'like sheep without a shepherd'. They are aimless and soon will be lost. The image of a shepherd is, as we have frequently seen, ambiguous. Shepherds were generally thought of as of ill repute and shameful. Their testimony was not heard in a law court. Yet it is also an image of God, who is 'my shepherd', and David, the greatest of the Kings, whose descendent will be the true and wise king whose name will be 'The Lord-our-integrity', was a shepherd boy, but accomplished enough to be able to kill bear and lion with his trusty sling and smooth stones. Jesus will undergo the shame of death on the cross, yet he is the one who is 'The Lord-our-integrity'.