

## *Compassion Enough For All*

(Matthew 14:13-21 preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020)

Many years ago, I led a homework club at a public housing estate. To help the children learn we did all kinds of activities. Often, we would bake Anzacs, pancakes and choc chip biscuits. The children would cook themselves afternoon tea and take the leftovers home. They loved it, the measuring, the waiting, the eating. It became a tradition, that when we weren't cooking, I would bring homemade choc chip cookies for them.

Preparing, cooking and eating together was wonderful, smiling faces, co-operative kids, hospitality and dignity.

In our story today, Jesus is hurting and distressed. He has just been informed that his cousin John has been violently killed. Grief stricken he needs to get away, the disciples put him in the boat and take him to a quiet place.

But, the crowds won't leave him alone, they follow and he is confronted by a large crowd.

Jesus response – to do as they ask – to teach and to heal, despite his grief. After all they have come a long way.

After a long day (made longer no doubt by carrying his grief) the disciples suggest they send the crowd on their way. Jesus will have none of it, he has compassion on the crowd still – he asks the disciples to get food for them.

After some consternation the disciples find two fish and five loaves of bread.

Jesus sits the crowd down, prays a blessing and breaks bread and it is shared amongst the crowd. All are fed and there are leftovers. All are content.

We know this story well, all the gospels have a version of it. Somehow, two fish and five loaves, sustains a large crowd.

Today I don't want to concentrate so much on the miracle itself but rather on what Jesus does.

Jesus is interrupted, it seems rest is impossible.

Jesus puts his own needs aside and has compassion, responding to their needs with profound love. He sees the needs of the people and responds to such.

We know meals are important to Jesus – think the wedding at Cana, eating with Zaccheus, meals with Mary, Martha and Lazarus, time with his disciples in an upper room, eating with tax collectors and sinners and now with thousands.

Jesus out in the middle of nowhere sits the crowd down. He creates a great open table under the evening sky. All are invited, it doesn't matter what you do or don't believe, what creed you subscribe to, what your gender is, how old you are, all are welcome. All divisions are gone – here everyone is considered a part of God's family.

Jesus can't let the crowds fend for themselves and won't let them undertake a long journey home without sustenance, both physical and spiritual.

Jesus takes what is offered and makes something of it, makes more of it than anyone could imagine.

Jesus shows us how to do it, teaches us how to treat others.

Jesus shows us God's crazy love – God's lavish abundance.

So, what might we learn from this episode?

- Sometimes in the midst of grief there is compassion
- Love means being attentive to the needs of others
- No-one is excluded from God's table, there are no boundaries and all are treated as guests
- In God's world, there is no hoarding only sharing, no discarding only gathering, there is always more to share

This message of hospitality is important in our world today. We know many are hungry for food and for peace and justice. We know there is enough for all if we learn to share.

Rather than being overwhelmed by this, let us learn from Jesus and take some simple steps, let's just start where we are.

At Footscray Baptist we have done that a little bit – last year sharing soup and bread with the homeless, regular donations to Micare, and, more recently our donations to Sanctuary. That is great start and something recipients have all been very grateful for.

Can we do more though?

What if we didn't just make donations but rather (when Covid lockdown is over) we cooked together and ate meals together? What if we shared recipes? What if we gardened together and grew food to use?

What if we saw issues as opportunities and possibilities rather than problems?

What if we opened up our church doors and shared our space for meals, for activities and formed enduring relationships with our neighbours?

Sometimes opportunity comes when we are at our lowest, saddest, most fearful. The crowd came looking for hope and got so much more.

Offering welcome, relationship, dignity, a word of peace and blessing will make such a difference to others, and probably change us in ways we can only imagine. Out of our small offerings there would be so much more to share.

We worship a generous God, a God who responds to the deep-seated needs of all; a God who welcomes all and does not require us to live up to a complex criteria; a God who makes so much out of little; a God who continues to give and give. We worship a God of lavish abundance.

As we leave this place, let us go knowing we are showered in such lavish love and all we need to do is to start, to take just one little step in showing compassion to others. Let's just start. Amen.