

Endless Compassion

(Sermon by Cheryl Williams, preached at Footscray Baptist on August 2nd, 2026 – Matthew 14:13-21)

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Good morning, I am a friend of Jesus. I recall a time that was very interesting, let me tell you about it.

We had just heard about the death of our friend John the Baptist, who was also Jesus' cousin. It had been a very violent death, and we were all shell shocked at the event. We all thought it would be a very good idea to get away and try and process what had happened. So, when Jesus suggested we get away for a bit, we all jumped at the chance. Time out and a chance to grieve would be good for us, especially for Jesus. He didn't say much, but I think it really rocked him. As was his way, he didn't seek revenge (I would have), he just wanted to spend time with his Father in prayer. So, it was a pretty sad time for all of us.

We went to a fairly secluded place, or at least we thought it was. The crowds soon discovered where we were and they followed in their thousands. They were searching for something - some needed healing, others just wanted to hear from Jesus, to listen to his teaching.

We tried to protect Jesus, but he insisted on getting out amongst them and doing what he could. The man's compassion knew no end, despite he needing to take care of himself, he just went out and did what he could for the people there.

He went about sharing and helping others all day. It was starting to get late, the sun was beginning to set, and we were a long way from anywhere and the people should have been starting to journey home. We saw this as a chance to help Jesus get out of the pickle, he had got himself into, and let him have some alone time, so we strongly suggested to him that he should send them on their way.

We weren't heartless, we could see that people were engaged with what Jesus was doing and saying, but we knew they would soon be hungry, and we knew we didn't have the resources to feed them. Sending them home seemed like a win win.

Imagine our surprise when he refused and suggested that rather than sending them away, we should give them something to eat. Where did he think we could get any food from, no local shops or traders nearby, no farms with excess produce. Anyway, one of us found some bread and fish, but this was never going to make a dint in feeding the people. Anyway, we gave to Jesus and waited to see if he would see sense, and send the crowd on their way.

But no.

He looked to the heavens and prayed and broke the bread and then told us to hand it out. Jesus often broke bread with others, he did it with many so-called sinners, he would do it in an upper room with all of us before things took a turn for the worst and then with the couple travelling to Emmaus. As he did it and before we all had to hurry up and hand it out, I thought about how God had provided food, manna in the wilderness for the Israelites. As we handed it out to all kinds of people, from everywhere,

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children, women and men I began to daydream about the heavenly banquet Jesus referred to, is this what it would look like?

Anyway, we handed it out to all and then people also began to add anything they had to the feast. Everyone was satisfied and we even had leftovers - what to do with them? I guess we should do just as Jesus did and hand them out to others in need. There was abundance and generosity and great compassion shown that day.

When we eventually got home after that big day, I thought about what I had learnt and what Jesus had been teaching us, his disciples, those closest to him who had joined him on this journey for quite some time.

Here are some of my conclusions.

- Even when we think we have few resources - food, time, money, we should still use what we have to show compassion.
- We shouldn't try to pass on the responsibility to care for others to someone else.
- Maybe sometimes when we are grieving or experiencing sadness that is precisely the time, we are able to show compassion, to show empathy, to understand the pain and heartbreak of another.
- Life is actually complex - some are grieving, others are in physical pain and need healing, some are searching for peace, some are hungry, sometimes all of these things are happening for us at the same time. When we look at the world, we see loss and grief, pain, conflict, famine and oppression and it is in all of these situations we are called to show endless compassion.
- Compassion isn't just feeling sorry for someone, it is acting and responding to the needs of others without any thought of getting something in return. It is not standing over someone and treating them as an underling to whom you do something; it is standing on the grass beside them and sharing the same bread.
- Jesus challenges us to be his hands and feet - literally, it is with teamwork that we can accomplish great things.
- Out of something seemingly small can come great blessing
- I wonder if when share, it is then that we have leftovers to share with others.
- That day everyone was feed, there were no barriers, no boundaries, everyone was welcome to participate. Genuine hospitality is really important; we should welcome everyone to our tables. How different would the world be if we all sat down and shared a meal or two?
- Sometimes when we are interrupted, even if we are doing something really important, it might just be that the interruption is even more important.
- God's kingdom, God's world seems to be characterized by compassion, generosity, inclusion, sharing and doing what we can no matter how small or seemingly insignificant it might be, you never know where it might lead.

Listeners, can I leave you with a prayer written long after I lived but which sums up some of what I learnt on that day where Jesus shared an ordinary meal with many, yet it was an extraordinary meal.¹

¹ From T Teresa of Avila (1515–1582) *Christ Has No Body*

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Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.