

### *Matthew 14.13-21*

*Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, 'This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.' Jesus said to them, 'They need not go away; you give them something to eat.' They replied, 'We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.' And he said, 'Bring them here to me.' Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.*

This week a small crowd gathered by the station to prayer walk for our community – we were from both sides of the tracks – two neighbouring parishes joining together to walk and pray together. We chatted about the many issues - we noticed things – and we prayed for the many concerns we had – we discussed the emotions around the road closures – the anger and upset many are feeling about the traffic scheme – the fears about the air quality – the general awareness of the needs of our community. It all felt very important. We were a crowd attempting to see our community with compassion – aware of what needs healing – what needs our prayers and as one person from The Good Shepherd Church said – to pray that we as churches together might have some revelation for how we can respond and enable healing for our neighbourhood.

Jumping into our gospel reading and we see another crowd – a huge crowd – a group of people who had followed Jesus, a massive gathering of people who needed curing – a lot of needy people. We can see in Jesus’ response to them – that Jesus was moved with compassion – he loved and cared for them...

It is clear from the Gospels that Jesus went out of his way to show his love for those who needed to be loved – especially those who felt unloved.

The crowd in our story would have contained a mixture of people – outcasts, desperate people, along with the curious and also probably those who might have been hostile. Let’s be honest - a crowd containing people just like us, or at least, our first century equivalents.

We hear that Jesus looked on them and he ‘had compassion’. The Greek word used to describe Jesus’ feeling is (and I’m not sure I can accurately pronounce this Greek word) ‘*splagchnisthes*.’ It is the strongest word for pity in the Greek Language. It comes from the word ‘*splagchna*’ which means ‘bowels.’ It means to be moved to the pit of stomach, a ‘stomach-churning’ emotion. Jesus was moved with compassion for the people.

In the Christian Church we believe that to see Jesus is to see God, and so we see from this passage that God is ‘moved with compassion’ for us. God’s love is so great that it hurts. It quite literally hurts in Jesus’ love for us in his crucifixion and death. Yet it is also a love we cannot escape. A love that loves us when we cannot love ourselves or cannot feel loved.

This is our Gospel, our ‘Good News’ for the world – we are loved by God!

So Jesus is ‘moved with pity’ for the crowds, but unlike what we so often do, or maybe what I often do - Jesus does not feel bad

for a bit, and then forget about it. He acts. He summons his disciples. The people are fed.

Like the disciples, we are called with all of our gifts and talents, all our weaknesses and failings, to be with Jesus. All of us here – all of us in this Church family - we are all called to be with Jesus.

To be in the presence of love is the height of our calling.

This is the primary reason we come to Church or over recent weeks – why we have been connecting with Church beyond our building. Of course God is always present with us, but one of the lovely things about being here in church with you all is that I feel this place hallowed by the prayers of many generations – and for me it really helps me to connect to and to know God’s presence.

This is the height of our calling to be with God.

Here, in God’s word, in one another, and in communion - we are in God’s presence.

We know profoundly from our time of having to be church beyond our lovely building - that it is not enough ‘to be with’ God and get ourselves a nice feeling, because we are also called to act. We are called to be with the world, so that the whole world can know the presence of Christ.

We have been loved and now we must love.

A German scholar and teacher called Adolf von Harnack who wrote and spoke in the early 1900s said that once we crack open the nut of Christianity, and discard the shell of Church protocols and traditions, we find the kernel. This core, the essence of Christianity could be summarised in one phrase, which he said was “the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man.” If we update the language for now – Harnack says that all of Christianity is about our relationship with God as parent

and our relationship with all humanity as our sisters and brothers.

Harnack was criticised for throwing away too much and that “The Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man” left nothing for people to live by, his only response to his critics was “you obviously haven’t tried it.”

Harnack did not want to get rid of the Church, he simply wanted the Church to realise that it did not exist for itself, but to proclaim these values that exist at its centre. It exists to promote the message that we are loved by God, and that God wants us to love each other. In Jesus’ life and death we are shown how much we are loved by God. We are also given an example of how we are to love others. The Church exists to teach love, and to show love.

Walking and praying for our community this week with our parish neighbours was our attempt to notice our brothers and sisters with Jesus’ compassion – to look for the things that needed healing. We need to pray and we need to show love. Like Jesus, once we are aware of the needs of our parish – we need to act.

Jesus was ‘moved with pity’ for the crowd. He loved them and was aware of their needs. His response was to call us, his disciples, to be with him, healing our own divisions, and then being sent out to love and heal and nurture and feed the world.

Amen to that!