

Matthew 14:13-21

You Give them Something to Eat

Nunawading and Waverley, 2-8-20

Dear friends in Christ,

When Jesus heard that his cousin John had been beheaded, he retreated to **a deserted place** to not only grieve but to evade emissaries from Jerusalem who could capture him and end his ministry prematurely. He needed to prepare his disciples and complete his preaching of the coming kingdom throughout Galilee and Judea. Crowds were a problem because they exposed him to the authorities.

Yet, look at the way he responded to the crowd when he landed on the other side of Lake Galilee. Did he think, "Oh no, I need to be alone." Not at all – he greeted them warmly and had **compassion on them**, letting them bring their sick forward **and healing them**.

We are not bothering the Lord with our prayers, our constant wanting and our often garbled, confused and half-hearted utterances directed towards him. Jesus' feeling for the great throng of people welled up from within him, a sensation of **compassion** that went through his body. Compassion literally means a yearning from the bowels. When our Lord Jesus turns his attention to us, it is with all his being; not like me looking up from my newspaper when my wife begins talking. He is ready for us, with all the power and love he has within him. He forgets himself, what he wants, even his own safety, to forgive, to heal us, to restore us to a fullness of life.

The idea of sending the crowd away hungry, **dismissing them** to fend for themselves at a late hour when local market places may have closed was not in Jesus' lexicon. He wished that the crowd would stay with him and be properly looked after. So he turned to his disciples with a real challenge: **you give them something to eat**. Rather than avoid the crowd's need for food, Jesus was expecting the disciples to act in faith. With him in their midst they could deal with the problem themselves. In Jesus' mind, they had the capacity to do this; **it is not necessary for them to go** at all.

You give them something to eat is the challenge of mission. Like the disciples, we are not used to thinking of the wider community and its need. Often, our church is the focus. The other issue is that we don't think we can do anything because we are small and the people are too many. In our Whitehorse Pastors Network, we were asked to share what we were doing in mission during in these Covid19 times. Sadly, it was very little. One church stood out: it set up in its car park a meeting place for international students who could come and receive a helpful pack, containing food items and an invitation to an online Alpha course. Hundreds took packs and a few joined Alpha. What a great idea. This church responded to the words of Jesus: **you feed them**, and that is what they did. Of course, feeding could stand for an attempt to meet any need in the community.

Our Lord Jesus is amongst as we gather together as church, coming to us as his word is proclaimed and dwelling in us as our Saviour in his sacramental body and blood. In some ways, nothing should be too hard for us. He is our resource, if you want to put it crudely. He is our power to accomplish the initiatives we may have. Of course, everything has to be weighed and tested but our Lord is inviting us to think big and realise that we can be world-changers through him.

The disciples said, **we do not have anything here except five loaves and two fish**. Knowing what we know, that Jesus was going to feed five thousand, and that was not including the women and the children, it is almost comical. It is the sight of 12 grown men pulling out their empty trouser pockets and saying, "Lord, don't expect us to do anything, we only have 5 loaves and two fish; not even enough for us." Yet, in the Lord's hands, with his blessing over them and **his thanks**, the empty baskets the disciple brought with them became full, and kept filling as they distributed the bread and fish to the people. So prodigious was our Lord's generosity that everyone had more than enough and were satisfied. Twelve baskets full of **left-over pieces** remained, one each for the 12 apostles, just to reinforce the lesson of Jesus' power and love.

You give them something to eat is a gospel command, that is, it is something Christ accomplishes through us. In the end, it is not our doing but he working his miracles through us.