

Sermon on Mark 6:30-34,53-56 - The Compassion of Christ

By the Reverend Jackie Bullen

Sunday 18 July 2021

Most of us will have had days when we have sat up in bed and realized that the day ahead was going to be quite hectic. Almost before we clean our teeth we have that feeling that we won't manage to achieve everything on that ever growing To Do List and our heat sinks as we walk into the kitchen and reach for the coffee. De caffeinated in just not going to cut it this morning.

Whether your diary is full of appointments, meetings or chores, it can make even a lunch date with a friend or a cuppa with your Mother feel like one thing too many in a busy day.

This is before you even think about what you might cook for dinner.

What a shame.

No wonder that ready meals and pre-packed sandwiches line supermarket shelves and fast food outlets are getting busier.

I read in an article that due to the rise in popularity of fast food restaurants, the Golden Arches of McDonald's are more widely recognized than the Christian cross in some parts of the world.

As a clergy person I hear the term 'wellbeing' quite often. Peterborough Diocese, along with other Dioceses promote this term and try to encourage clergy and laity alike to consider our own wellbeing. Body, mind and spirit.

It is a good and sound ideal which people like our Parish Nurse Eddie Miller promote in many different ways. And employers and leader all over the world also try to speak about and encourage wellbeing in many ways. But, part of the problem is that we are human beings and we have trouble setting boundaries in our lives.

Jesus set an example for us of setting boundaries and limits. He said yes many times, but he also knew that there were times to say no.

When the demands on him became too great and he risked being physically and spiritually exhausted, he withdrew to a quiet place.

He recognized that he needed time to stop, reflect, pray and nourish his inner self. Although he is God, but he was also human, and along with that came the needs of nourishment and rest.

But we find it so difficult to do

In many churches it is interesting to note that the Quiet Days and Quiet Mornings we provide are never well attended. Maybe next time stop and think about why you don't take those opportunities to spend time with God.

Are you too busy?

Having said that, I am fully aware that there is a difficult balance to achieve in life between retreat and self-care and then being active in meeting people's needs.

If we aspire to be like Jesus we have to be open to listening to people's pain and discomfort, allow ourselves to be moved by it and then be prepared and do what we can to ease their situation and move them forward to a more comfortable way of living.

At the same time, we should be open to speak about what it is that motivates us to look at the ills of the world and to want to change things for the better.

Simply being confident to say that as Christians we try to follow Jesus teaching and aspire to be more like him.

Jesus displayed his concern for people.

Despite the fact that he was tired, he ministered to the needy souls because they needed spiritual leadership.

Jesus showed compassion by staying to teach them.

Compassion is at the core of Jesus' heart.

He sees a flock of sheep without a shepherd.

Lost, hysterical, wandering aimlessly and hopeless.

Jesus listened to them, understood their needs and responded with compassion.

He helped them by teaching them, organizing them, speaking for them and feeding them.

The people wanted miracles because they believed they could not meet their own needs, but Jesus kept urging them to feed one another.

He told them repeatedly that they could meet their own needs by helping one another.

We also want miracles today.

Sometimes we believe that we can't meet our own needs, but in reality, if we listen carefully to others and work together we can often find a way forward.

And who do we listen to and try to help?

The answer has to be, like Jesus, we should not discriminate when it comes to offering help and healing.

There are no examples in the Bible of people only being helped if they pass a test, belong to a certain group, have a certain colour skin or live in a particular place.

He healed the grateful and the thankless, the selfless and the selfish.

Remember the story of the ten lepers? Jesus healed all of them, but only one returned and gave thanks to Jesus.

We have been given many examples of compassion and care for others and we, as members of the church, need to follow this example.

The church needs to have the same reputation today as Jesus had then.

The place where love, compassion and healing is available to all comers.

We can address both the spiritual and the physical needs of people. We are a servant church.

If we want to lead like Jesus, we have to touch and change the lives of those around us. Never considering people as a burden but willing to offer them the opportunity of God's healing love and compassion.

And in all this is the need for balance.

They say you cannot pour from an empty jug.

Jesus urged his disciples, who had just returned from a long and exhausting ministry trip, to come and rest awhile.

Discipleship today as in Jesus time calls us to strike a balance between service and renewal. Work, rest and play as some advertising slogan once wisely put it.

All of us need time.

Time alone with Christ.

We need to take a Sabbath from the work and commitments of our daily lives and spend time with God.

Our Christian life is a marathon, not a sprint.

We need to have endurance to reach our heavenly rest.

We need diligence in serving the Lord and diligence in taking time to rest.

If we don't take time to rest, we will come apart physically.

Medicine tells us that many of our physical problems are a result of the lack of rest.

We will also come apart spiritually if we don't take time for spiritual renewal and time with God.

When we do find ourselves able to come away to our own deserted places, we can be renewed and refreshed by God's love.

Jesus looks on us with compassion as he teaches us that we belong to him. Draws us into a community of faith and shows us how to care for others. To go about our daily lives sharing God's love and truth.

When we come to a quiet place, God welcomes us with his healing grace and peace. He renews us and sends us out to share his gifts with the world. When we get tired, we come to God for rest and refreshment, and then the cycle continues.

Churches are required to be those quiet places where we can find the rest and refreshment God wants to give us. The church of God, this church, in our prayer, in our worship, provides an experience of God's grace, peace and healing.

When we are renewed we can then go out into the world and take with us God's love and compassion to a hurting world.