

PENTECOST 8B 18072021 The Reverend Lorna Green

2 Samuel 7.1-14a; Ps 89.21-38; Ephesians 2.11-22; Mark 6.30-34, 53-56

Mark 6.30-34, 53-56

The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, 'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.' For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the market-places, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

I'm sure you have all heard the term 'work-life balance'. People are worrying that they spend too much time working and not enough time living, and it seems to be getting harder for us to achieve that balance. We all know about burn-out: when a person works so hard, gives so much of themselves, doesn't rest enough and eventually hits the wall, collapsing mentally, physically or both.

We might think these are modern problems, but we find in the gospels that Jesus faced similar difficulties. After his cousin John the Baptist was beheaded by Herod, Jesus got the disciples back together. He had sent them out to the towns and villages to spread the word. We can imagine they were all tired and needed to regroup and refresh themselves. So Jesus said, 'Let's get away for a bit, just us, and have a break.'

They got in the boat and went to a nice peaceful spot: but the crowd followed them, running around the lake to beat them to it. That was the end of their rest!

Jesus didn't send the crowd away; he didn't say 'Come on guys, give us a break- come back tomorrow, or next week!' He had compassion on them. He knew they were needy, and he began to teach them.

The lectionary reading for today leaves out a couple of important passages. The next thing that happened was that Jesus fed the five thousand or so people who were there. After that, Jesus sent the disciples off to sail across the lake, dismissed the crowd, and went off to pray by himself. When it was evening, he came walking across the water to meet the boat- frightening the living daylights out of the disciples!

Our reading takes up again after they had all arrived on the shore, and once again were swamped by crowds of people.

Once people got to know about Jesus, that he was a great teacher and a healer AND he could feed them, it became extremely difficult for him to have time alone with his friends. He had to go up a mountain so he could pray by himself.

And that's an important point: Jesus made the effort to walk or climb to a deserted place so he could have some time alone with God. How much effort are we prepared to put into making time to pray?

Jesus knew the importance of rest, of getting away from it all, spending time with friends, and spending time in prayer. But the compassion he had for others took precedence.

Compassion is not the same as pity. You can pity someone from a distance; you can pity someone without being moved to do anything about it. Compassion literally means to suffer together: to feel with the other and want to relieve their suffering. Compassion motivates us to act.

Compassion motivated Jesus to put aside his own needs for the sake of the suffering people who surrounded him.

Compassion shines through Jesus and lights up the gospel stories of his life. As his followers, we are to follow his example and be beacons of compassion.

And, following his example, we are to make time and space to pray, and to recuperate when we are weary; to have compassion for ourselves.

Jesus said he wanted us to live abundant lives, to flourish and become the people God has called us to be. What do we need to live an abundant life? What do you, as an individual need? What do we, as a parish community, need?

As we consider what we need- more rest, more down-time, more prayer and so on- we also need to think about what we might change so we can get that into our lives. Shall I give up an hour of TV in the evening to read and pray instead? Will I determine to get home from work a bit earlier so I can be with the family? There will be a different answer for each person because I'd be surprised if anybody could say they have the balance exactly right. Can anyone honestly say they pray or rest or exercise as much as they need to? Our lives are increasingly full, and there are many demands on our time. Most retired people have full diaries, let alone those in paid work or caring for children!

Mothers are good at putting themselves last, and many people feel guilty about relaxing, doing nothing, or doing something they enjoy, when there is always so much work to do.

Jesus gave up his rest-time because he was filled with compassion; but he went off by himself afterwards. In the past, Christians have been encouraged to deny themselves in ways that were not helpful. Rest and recuperation are not self-indulgences but necessities.

Jesus knew that, and he also knew that he was able to put aside his own needs for a while for the sake of others.

What can the church do to help people live abundant lives?

The church can be a place where people find compassion, welcome, and unconditional acceptance. We, the church, offer that welcome and acceptance; compassion motivates us to bring food for the needy, to give money to aid agencies, and to love our neighbours in all sorts of ways.

What do we offer hard-working Christians who try to balance self-giving and self-care? How can we support one another?

Could you offer some of your time to be on the roster and share the load a little?

You might have heard of the '80-20 rule': in any given organisation 80% of the work / volunteering is done by 20% of the people. That holds true for parishes as well, but it doesn't need to be because if we all share the responsibilities then nobody is overloaded.

We could have compassion on the folks who clean our toilets, sweep the carpark and maintain the gardens, nurture our children in Sunday School, serve morning tea and clean the kitchen afterwards, count the offering and do the banking, and do all those important tasks that keep the church running- and maybe then offer to take a little off their shoulders by sharing the load with them.

Being church is about so much more than getting together on Sundays. Sunday worship is central to our lives as Christians, but we go out from here into the world of families, work, and all the things that make up the week.

May we be beacons of compassion, lighting up our homes, workplaces, communities, and our parish, in the loving strength of God's Spirit.

The Lord be with you.