

Sermon for 18 July 2021- Mark 6: 30-34 & 53-56, Ephesians 2:11-end

Lord Jesus, help us keep trusting in you, making you the cornerstone of our lives and receiving your powerful and immense healing and fill us with your peace. Amen

- OK hands up who has heard of the story of the Feeding of the 5000. It is the only miracle to appear in every single Gospel, importantly highlighting God's abundance and a pointer towards the institution of Holy Communion.
- Well, that's in the bit that's missing from our reading today - you may have noticed that we have Mark 6: 30-34 & 53-56
- So why, I hear you ask, has that been left out today?
- It must be so that we focus on a different part of Jesus's ministry - his ability to **heal** people because of his immense love and compassion, God in human form - visible and living among people 2000 years ago bringing in the good news of the Kingdom of God.

v34 *"As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them"*

- Jesus was God in human form. God is love. You can only show compassion towards people if you have love towards them.
- If you dislike them, are annoyed by them or think they are inferior to you - eg Jews towards Gentiles, during the slave trade white towards black, - and nowadays any kind of discrimination towards a minority, you do not love those people in the way Jesus asks us to include every person and you therefore cannot show compassion - look at the torrents of racist abuse the 3 black England footballers got straight after the end of the Euro final because they missed their penalties.
- Abusers do not show love, abusers cannot by definition show compassion.
- The people who then **did** show compassion, sympathy and encouragement towards Rashford, Sancho and Saka following this abuse were showing God's love for another human being: whether or not they believed in Jesus, they were acting in a wholly Christian way.
- I suspect many *are* actually Christians who draw their strength to speak up against racism from their trust in our God who shows no partiality –
- A Christian faith means we know God still loves us, Christ brings forgiveness and new beginnings. Resurrection . **Jesus heals us.**
- Our shared confession every week allows us as Christians to acknowledge our continued need of healing and then accept God's abundant forgiveness to start afresh. It helps ground us in where we find strength and the source of true life – in Christ, with Christ and through Christ – who opened up our way to God the Father.
- But life is exhausting and without God to guide us, there is huge danger of burn out.
- Just before today's reading, Jesus has sent his chosen 12 disciples off in pairs, beginning their own ministry – to spread the Good News of Jesus and to heal, and they have returned full of their stories and eager for a debrief, to tell Jesus how it went. They are excited and on a high, but Jesus knows it has used up a lot of mental and spiritual energy as well as being probably quite physically exhausting and wants to get them to take a breather .....

v31 *"Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while".*

- Jesus seems acutely aware of the danger of burnout and of course he knows instinctively that his power to heal comes through God's Holy Spirit and he needs time with his Father to rest and connect with God and renew his healing energy and to show his disciples the way they too can have the best chance of serving God in the most powerful way, by resting in God's presence, praying and being renewed by his healing spirit.
- But did Jesus, being fully divine, really need to spend time with God his Father to renew his healing strength?

- We often hear in the gospels of Jesus withdrawing to pray, alone, so I think the answer must be yes. Maybe it was because he was fully human (except for sin) as well as fully divine, that the human weakness of burnout was as much a danger to him as to us- except that he recognised it (remember he felt the power go out from him when the haemorrhaging woman touched his cloak in a reading we had a few weeks ago) and **did something about it** and knew exactly who could restore his strength- God the Father.
- It's hard work when you start out on a new job or a new project or a new school year in a different class - you need to learn new skills, interact with new people, get off on the right foot, you naturally make an extra special effort, as I expect the disciples had, going out at the start of their ministry - and all this is exhausting and actually unsustainable in the long run without rest.
- **Stop- rest - set out again refreshed** - after all that is the rhythm of our body clocks.....we cannot go 24 hours and then another 24 hours without some rest and sleep. And if you go too many nights (or days if you are working shifts) with too little sleep, your body can't cope.
- And if you cram too much in the daytime without pausing for breath or regular food, you suffer.
- Sometimes we are forced to stop- we get ill and have to step back to recover,
- During the pandemic lockdowns we had to stay in, life was more restricted.(that didn't make it easy, but perhaps as Christians it gave us more time to engage with our faith and pray for help in the difficult days and weeks) - it certainly got me saying Evening Prayer a lot more often than I had done previously - seeking a way to stop - rest and feel refreshed by prayer with others.
- But unfortunately we hear in the gospel today, Jesus is prevented from helping his disciples draw breath, come close to God and regroup - the crowd is clamouring for attention, finding ways to get to the next place ahead of them because they want to be healed and have immense faith that Jesus is the one to do that.
- Do you feel like that too sometimes in today's world? The world seems to press in on us, urge us to do more, buy more, consume more, throw things away, buy more, spend more money, spend a little longer on that game, react to another social media post, rather than stepping back and saying "Whoa do I need to do this? Let me just stop and think about it for a moment. "
- *That's* the time to listen to Jesus - to think about his preventative measure for burnout, stress or irritability - **stop, rest and let God heal and refresh us**. It doesn't have to take long but let's try and make it a habit.
- Next time you make a cuppa, try sitting quietly on your own and just letting God reach you and calm you down. For a few minutes don't ask God for anything.
- *'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.'*
- Jesus can bring us rest if we trust in him alone, if we build regular time to pray and to be in God's presence, sit in a peaceful spot - maybe in church, maybe in a garden or a room where you can step back from the internet, your phone, other people and be renewed by God's immense love for you.
- God's healing love through Jesus knows no boundaries.
- So let Christ be our cornerstone, let us trust in him alone and let God the Father heal and restore us and bring us strength by stepping back to receive His love and then going out to serve Him by following Jesus, healed, forgiven and refreshed.
- In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen