

Romans 9:1-4**Matthew 14:13-21****Introduction**

Over the past two and a half years the PCC and I have spent a lot of time, effort and energy in getting a new notice board put up at Foxton. There were endless discussions with the DAC and a long wait for planning permission, identifying the funds, choosing the design. And finally two weeks ago our beautiful new board was finally put up. We were thrilled. Imagine, then my despair when one of the church wardens emailed me to say that someone had noticed a spelling mistake in my email address. The astonishing thing about that is that during the discussion with the DAC the whole PCC had had to look at and agree the wording for the board. Twelve people looking and not one of us noticing. Sometimes we can be so familiar with something we don't actually notice what is really before us.

This certainly happens with Bible stories and, I think, particularly with our reading this morning. I suspect that most of us are so familiar with it that we may have stopped taking notice. So let's have a look into the story and see what we can learn.

Firstly I want you to ask yourself, "Does this story show us more of Jesus as man or as God?" You don't need to tell me your answer but have the question in your mind as we look in. I am going to ask us to put us in the place of three different parties in the story and see what we learn.

Jesus

The context of the story is that Jesus has just received the news of the horrific death of John the Baptist; A vile act fueled by anger and lust. Jesus has just lost John, his cousin and colleague in a shocking way and in a way that showed him a glimpse of the sort of thing that lay ahead for him.

Jesus had suffered a close bereavement and was feeling great sadness. He needed some personal space – time out, time to adjust, time to hide away and be still, to reflect, perhaps to pray. But above all to be still, to not have people around him.

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I guess we have all had times like that, (bereavement, redundancy, end of a relationship) times of loss and sadness when we needed to go away to a quiet place a place of solace and calm. Imagine then if you found the beach/church/hillside full of a noisy crowd claiming your attention when we just needed to be alone.

How would you react?

Jesus's reaction is not one of anger or frustration but of compassion. He translates his own sorrow into love for them and he heals the sick. He transforms his own feelings into love for those in need.

The crowd

Were probably largely unaware of Jesus own need. They were focused on their own need and so followed Jesus because they wanted to receive from him. They may have needed healing, they may have wanted to learn from him, they may simply have wanted to be near him because doing so made them feel better. Many of them may not have been aware that they were needy they just knew they wanted to find Jesus – and so they came after him

The disciples

One of the twelve or one of the hangers on.

You see how Jesus cares for the people and somehow that stimulates a caring attitude in you.

You too begin to notice their need – and particularly that you are in a lonely place miles from anywhere and it is getting late.

Who will feed them? Where will they sleep?

What is the best thing to do about this?

So you come to Jesus with a suggestion; send them away so that they can find food for themselves; A practical suggestion, even thoughtful in its own way.

Jesus is always delighted when people around him come up with ideas that show that they are thinking of the needs of others.

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But when we notice need often our response is to bring it to Jesus and expect him to deal with it, to provide – we like to pass the buck, I've noticed this tendency is committee meetings where someone will come up with a good idea along the lines of 'we really need to do something about so and so'. But the attitude often is "I have identified the need someone else needs to do something about it."

But Jesus turns the helpful suggestion on its head; "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat!". He is really saying, 'If you really care for them why don't you give them something to eat?'

This is so often what happens when we respond to Jesus' call to love him. One small idea of how to care for others is bounced back with a huge and impossible proposal. Here they are in the middle of the countryside, not prepared for a huge crowd and Jesus tells them to feed the people. Often in the Christian life we can meet similar huge challenges thrown us by Jesus. We see a need, think of a small way of responding to it and the answer comes back, "You give them something to eat".

Our immediate response is, "I can't do it. I haven't got the time, the energy, the ability; all I have is....."

The disciples gave Jesus the little they had and he transformed it. We need to be prepared to give Jesus the little we have. It means, of course, that we will go hungry – as the disciples expected to when they gave all the food they had. So giving Jesus what we have isn't without cost.

What Jesus does with what we give him is unexpected and powerful, it is hard to describe and it is transformational.

Imagine yourself standing there. Jesus, surrounded by thousands of people, takes the pittance amount of food – probably enough for two people –
He prays over it
He thanks God for it.

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He breaks it and gives it to you
You give it to one person after another, and another and another

What has happened?

Being close to Jesus has stimulated compassion and thoughts of service, a concern for the needs of the crowd.
Jesus takes the intention and turns it upside down.
He hands it back to you making it more costly – ‘you do it’
In puzzled response to the challenge you offer what you have, knowing it is quite inadequate but still costly to you.
He blesses it gives it to you to give to everybody else

Jesus takes what we have
To resource what we had in mind – but not at all what we had in mind and transforms it into something wonderful.

The crowd and the disciples were astonished by what had happened
Their needs had been met
And then he sent them away.

He sent the crowd away so that they wouldn't latch onto the miraculous event and make him the object of hero worship

He sent the disciples away
Because he still needed to be alone:
To grieve
To restore his spirit
And to reenergize

The question I want to leave you with is, “When you see need how do you respond? Are you willing to let Jesus transform your response and take what you have, costly though it may be for his purposes. You may have experience of that happening a small idea you had was transformed by the Holy Spirit into something much bigger than you imagined. There may be

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need you are aware of that you want to bring to Jesus. Be ready for him to say, 'You do it' – and to take what you have. Costly as it might be – and transform it beyond your imagination.