

The Heart of Jesus

“When he heard the news about John, he left his home town Nazareth in a boat and went to a lonely place”. V13

What news did he hear about John?

John, his first cousin, had been executed by Herod. John had been imprisoned for his views on Herod's marriage. Herod had married the wife of his brother Philip's wife, and John's outspoken views on this marriage led him to prison and then to execution.

It was the news of John's death that Jesus grieved. Here we see the human nature of Jesus, on another occasion, he wept at the death of Lazarus, his good friend. Jesus grieved on at least two occasions and we observe what he did. He got away from things for a while. He took time out. He deliberately got into a boat and sailed away.

I'm sure that we have been there ourselves, when we have grieved the loss of a loved one, when someone we love has been hurt, we need space, we need time to reflect.

Jesus wasn't any different. He sought the lonely place. But for Jesus the lonely place was not merely an escape from people but the lonely place was a place near to God.

Jacob met with God in a lonely place. While he was on the run from his brother Esau, he met with God at night alone. He wrestled with an unknown man and in the morning, he said, “I have seen God face to face and I am still alive.”

Jesus went away to be with God. In those dark lonely moments of life, we have an opportunity to wrestle with God. To take all our thoughts and problems, doubts and fears to him, in a place that only we can go.

Where do you go when life gets too much for you? Where is your lonely place? Where is that place that you can meet with God?

But Jesus had a following by now and everywhere he went the crowd wasn't far behind him. When he got out of the boat, he saw the multitude coming towards him, with all their problems and all their fears. Jesus' lonely place now became a place of chaos. It would have been easy for him, to turn about and head somewhere else.

But no, we catch a glimpse of the heart of God. “When he saw the large crowd, his heart was filled with pity for them.” This is how God sees us. He has compassion for us. He reaches out to us and doesn’t turn us away. Our God is open to all our demands, all our needs, and he sees us and he has pity on us.

Jesus teaches us the importance of being a faithful disciple in a world of need. There is no escaping poverty today – walk the city streets of Glasgow, turn on our television for the news – visit the Lodging House Mission or Cross Reach in Govanhill and you will be reminded of the needs of the multitude and that’s just in Scotland. It has been asserted that, globally, the richest 1% now have as much wealth as the other 99%. There is gross, obscene global inequality. Over 700 million people live in extreme poverty. I’m sure the money that has been kicked around in football transfers recently is jarring to the throat.

When Jesus looked out, he saw the large crowd coming towards him, and he saw their need. He saw their hunger, their disease and the effects of this sinful world and what did he do? He healed those who were ill.

Jesus calls us to follow him on his own terms, not ours. He lays before us the template of Christian discipleship and he calls us to walk the way of Micah, the Old Testament prophet who wrote, what does the Lord expect of us? “To do what is just, to show constant love, to walk humbly with your God”.

Micah 4v8

Here in this lonely place, where Jesus carried his own pain, he sets his own pain aside to tend the needs of others. But perhaps in serving others in this way, in healing their pain, he found his own healing, as he again saw the vocation into which God had called him.

Luke 4 v18 “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, and announce the time of the Lord's coming”

He took five loaves and fish, looked up to Heaven and gave thanks and everyone had enough.

“Everyone ate and had enough. Then the disciples took up the 12 baskets full of what was left over.”

I'm sure we are familiar with the children's chorus, “Running over, running over, my cup is full and running over, since the Lord saved me, I'm happy as can be, my cup is full and running over.”

With Jesus, there is always blessing. With Jesus there are always abundance and leftovers.

This is perhaps one of the best stories of God's blessings in the Bible.

What I love about this part of the story is that there are 12 disciples and 12 baskets and they go about the crowd and collect up the leftovers. I can just picture them putting the basket on their heads to return again to Nazareth and do what with the leftovers? Exactly what Greggs does at the end of the day in Glasgow; when there are leftovers, they go to the town and pass it on to the poor, they pass them onto charities, who are feeding the homeless in the city centre.

Nothing is wasted.

Jesus' ministry goes further than the feeding of the 5000-plus women and children, it extends into the town and into the homes of the hungry and the story of the feeding of the 5000 would echo around the towns of Galilee.

Jesus calls us to be people who bless others with the abundance that he has given us. It might not always be money or material goods; it might be kindness and moral support.

Jesus sends us out in mission also. We are to follow him in our mission here at Cadder Church. We are called to reach out and welcome people with his spirit of inclusiveness and compassion.

So the lonely place that Jesus had gone to find God, had become a place of great blessing. His lonely place was a place of healing the crowds in body, spirit and mind. His lonely place became a place of feeding a hungry crowd.

Can we transform our lonely places in life, into places of healing?

Henri Nouwen called Jesus the wounded healer because Jesus accomplished his mission as nails were hammered into his hands, and feet fastened to the cross. His side was pierced to verify his death.

Yes, Jesus is the ultimate wounded healer.

When he returned from death, he showed them the marks of his death and he said to them, *as the Father has sent me, so I send you.*

We are not only saved by the wounded healer, we are called to follow him, engaging in mission his way and not ours. He calls us to pick up our basket and collect the leftovers of his blessing, to go out into the community and share his goodness, love and mercy.

This week what blessings can we share with others? What's in our basket to give to our neighbour?