

**Sermon:** The most loving thing a Christian can do?

**Reading:** Matthew 14:13-21

### **Introduction**

Here's a question to ponder, as a Christian what is the most loving thing a Christian could do for another person? There are many things we can do which could make a big difference in someones life, but what is the most loving? What do you think? Here are a few things to consider.....

We could forfeit our holiday this year and give it to someone who is in need of a break. It maybe a family who cant afford a holiday for themselves. This would be a good way to demonstrate our love for our neighbour.

How about be generous and commit financially to the Christian mission of the church. Commit to tithe 10% of our gross income each month. How does the 10% compare to what we are committing ourselves to now? Is it more or are we giving substantially less? This could be a way of practically demonstrating support for the Great Commission.

Forgiveness is grace we cherish from God, we love to hear the words of absolution and having the assurance God has forgiven us for the things we have done which offends Him. We could be bold and forgive someone who we may be angry with, show grace and not the grudge, To be Christian is to be a forgiving people, showing the depth of love God has for us by extending that grace to those who we need to forgive?

Think about donating a whole weekly shop we have bought for ourselves. All the things you would treat ourselves with, the nice foods, toiletries and other consumables, give a whole shop to another person. Is this a way of loving others as we love ourselves?

Which ones made us feel uncomfortable or was more challenging to us? Which brings me back to the question, What is the most loving thing a Christian can do for another person?

### **Context**

Jesus has amassed quite a following. He can go nowhere without people seeking Him out. Even in a solitary place people seek Him and find Him! Jesus name has become well known in Judea and beyond. Many are speaking about Him and about all His amazing works. No one has ever heard anything like this before.

His fame is spreading like wildfire, it would be almost impossible to keep something like this quiet, consider....

Those who were once unable to speak now cant stop singing His praises.

Those who were once blind are now witness of the many wonders they saw Him perform.

Those who were deaf able to recount the parables Jesus spoke and what He preached.

Even those tormented by unclean spirits, were delivered and set free & living at peace  
As His fame grows, so do the crowds and the curiosity seekers.

### **Needing a break!**

The pressures on Jesus and His disciples must have been immense, being surrounded by crowds who are constantly pressing in on Jesus must have claustrophobic, especially in the heat of the day.

In our reading today Jesus has heard about John's untimely death at the hands of Herod's wicked wife Herodias, during a feast at the palace.

The Scriptures tell us Jesus leaves the crowded places and sets sail with His disciples to an isolated place. However it's not long before the quietness of the solitary place is broken with the sound of many voices as the crowds have found Jesus and flock to Him with great anticipation.

Jesus looks and sees the multitude, the children running ahead of their family groups wanting to be first to see Him. The lame and crippled are lagging behind the crowds leaning heavily upon their crutches or being carried by friends. Jesus sees how tired and harassed many of them are. His heart is large and filled with compassion He goes out amongst them. Our God is not a God who is distant but a God who comes amongst us, with great compassion.

God is not elusive and in hiding, no God can be found when we seek Him with all of our heart. Our God gives Himself and never leaves us in our distress, misery, anxiousness and fretfulness alone, for His promise is to be with us always. We worship a God who is willing to dwell with all who humbly come before Him. He will reject no one who come to Him repentant and contrite in heart. We should pause at this point, for any who are distressed, anxious or afraid, stressed, exhausted or confused remember the wonderful words of Jesus who beckons us to, 'Come to me all who are heavy laden and burdened and I will give you (what?)

A prescription?

A good laugh?

A job to do?

This is what the world offers for those who are anxious, worried, burdened. What Jesus promises to give us is rest. Jesus says, 'Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest' (**Matt 11:28**). This is wonderfully demonstrated in our reading, as the people seek Him, they find Him!

He the towns people seek Jesus and find Him, the invitation also extends to us today. Jesus tells us, Come to Him for His yoke is easy and a burden is light. For He will not weigh us down with more than we can carry. Being yoked to Jesus means He will walk with us equally yoked, He will gently lead us and help us pull and carry the load.

The Psalmist grasped this important point when he writes, 'God is ever present help in times of trouble.... for we are to be still and know that He is God' (**Ps 46:1; 10**).

God is wonderfully patient, extravagantly gracious and does not avoid our company or abandon us when things get tough. The crowds are experiencing this for themselves, for Jesus is true to His word.

It has been a long day, Jesus has ministered to the crowds and healed all who were sick and in distress. The disciples are concerned and approach Jesus reminding Him it's getting late, the crowds need to think about returning home as they are hungry there is nowhere to buy food in this place. Jesus has a lesson to teach the disciples and an amazing miracle for the crowds to perform.

We must remember Jesus needs no man to tell Him it's getting late, for He is the light of the world. Jesus needs no man to tell Him the people are hungry for He knows all things and Jesus needs no man to tell Him what He needs to do for He is sufficient! The disciples are about to learn of the amazing power of Jesus even to feed the multitudes.

This passage should make us stop and ponder how we come before God in prayer. Thinking about our own prayer life, do we find ourselves telling God details of situations as though He is a God who is blind or ignorant of what is going on? Do we think God needs us to tell Him? Do we think God needs our advice and wise counsel?

I once heard someone saying If I had the power of Almighty God I would change so many things in this world but if I had the wisdom of God, I would leave things as they are

because God's ways are not our ways and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. We must have faith to trust God, He knows what He's doing, oh how we need to be taught again to practice the presence of God.

### **Jesus has a plan?**

In John's gospel Jesus tells the disciples to feed the people themselves! Phillip stating the obvious says, 'It would cost more than half a years wages to feed this crowd' (**John 6:7**). Philip should have said ok Lord, show me how and I will do it. This is the attitude of faith when God calls us to work. We may think we have nothing but what we are holding in our hands, but the impossible become possible when we give what is in our hands over to God. He can multiply whatever He wants.

History is filled with great men and women who have heard the voice of The Good Shepherd, felt the conviction of heart and acted on that conviction as Christ's Ambassadors. Im often inspired by the events surrounding George Mueller life who was tasked by God to look after the orphans living on the streets of Bristol. He built five orphanages and thousands of children found shelter, protection and food in these houses. Many times he was informed by the kitchen staff that the cupboards where bare and the shelves empty with nothing left to feed the children. However he would drop to his knees in prayer and in faith knowing God promises can be relied upon. God indeed provided for the hungry and the money required to build the homes, all needs where met. From empty cupboards, in orphanages to multitudes in a solitary place, with Jesus the hungry were fed and Jesus all things become possible.

How much do we limit God because we can't work out how to fulfil the task ourselves. When God asks of us the impossible, we need to demonstrate faith just like Ezekiel in the valley of dry bones by saying, You know Lord, You know.

Philip learned a valuable lesson this day, discovering Jesus is The Good Shepherd who leads His flock to green pastures, still waters and restores our souls. Jesus would not leave these people hungry and thirsty when He is amongst them. Do you think God is going to abandon us in our hour of need? Even if our life is about to be taken, who do you think is ready and waiting to greet you on the other side? For Jesus says, 'I will come to you and take you to be with me, so that where I am there you may be also' (**John 14**). How exciting it is to be a disciple of Jesus then and in our day today, for we never know what God is going to do next.

### **How much faith?**

God does test us in life, providing situations of challenge and it can seem as though God is not listening to us during these prolonged times. However have you considered in these times God is teaching us faith, this is the time of testing! Do we not set the same conditions our children in schools and colleges? They sit alone, no longer hearing the teachers voice until the time of the test is over. These are test conditions. It doesn't mean the teacher is not watching and overseeing the situation and willing the students to do well. The time of testing is a way to see how much we have learned. This is not for God's benefit for He already knows how we are going to respond. The Psalmist reminds us even before a word is on our lips God knows them (**Ps 139:4**).

God places us in the impossible situations and challenging times to reveal to us our heart and how deep our faith actually goes! Is prayer trust and faith our first response in the time of testing?

Be encouraged in times of testing James tells us and rejoice? (**James 1**). Paul writes these wonderful words to remind us, 'And we know that in all things God works for the

good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose' (**Rom 8:28**). Therefore we worship a God who knows all things, sees all things and has power over all creation. Jesus did not need Philip or any of the disciples to tell Him it's getting late and there is no food as if Jesus had missed it or was unaware of the situation! But it did provide a valuable lesson for the disciples to trust in Jesus to provide for their needs for Jesus had already got it in hand and what an amazing hand, because in these holy hands Philip places 5 small loaves and two small fish and it was enough.

We must never think as some teach that the crowd simply shared all they had with each other to have enough food. Anyone who teaches this don't understand the hospitality laws of the culture around Jesus. They have missed the point of one of the worlds greatest miracles. And Jesus knowing the skeptics would come with silly notions does it again later this time with another 4,000. What is remarkable is the mention of 5,000 men does not include the women and children, which means there could have been between 10 - 20,000 people in that solitary place who were fed with the five small loaves and two fish. God has a plan and we should never forget that, He is also the great provider. When we face situations that look impossible, we need to trust in God for He has a plan.

### **The most loving thing a Christian can do for another?**

I began today with a question, what is the most loving thing a Christian can do for another person? Have you worked out what it is yet?

We could forfeit our holiday to give to another which would be loving our neighbour as ourselves. We could tithe our income to support the missionary work of our church in our communities working out the great commission. We could give away our weekly shop to a local food bank, feeding the hungry. All of these would be wonderful acts of Christian love and charity. However wouldn't the most loving thing a Christian can do for another person is to introduce them to the Good Shepherd to hear the good news of a Saviour's love and tell them about Jesus, the great Saviour and provider whom they can call upon for themselves.

Jesus is the greatest hope this world has ever seen and the blessed friend we will ever have. For Jesus invites us to come to Him with all who are weary and burdened and He will give us rest for our souls. Jesus fed 5,000 men that day in the solitary place. Jesus provided for the children of George Mueller through faith in his calling. When God calls us may he quicken our soul and set a blaze in our hearts to trust Him for all we will need to complete His will.

Remember, I may feed the hungry, give all my wealth away and give up my body to be burned but if I do not have love I gain nothing. If we have the Spirit of God we will have a care not just for the physical needs of the people around us but also for the state of their eternal souls. The most loving thing a Christian can do for another is to tell them about The Saviour, the love of The Saviour and the sufficiency in life of our Saviour who brings more than this world can ever offer or provide. For we must learn how to feed people not just with the bread of life but with the bread from heaven, for this is eternal. Remember Jesus says, 'The one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened' (**Matthew 7:7-8**). **Amen**