

Sunday Between 31<sup>st</sup> July and 6<sup>th</sup> August [18]

Matthew 14:13-21

It ought to be universal recognised that generosity is a positive thing. When someone goes beyond their own convenience to do something to benefit another, that can never be wrong. All our readings today point to the unfathomable generosity of God. But generosity, like grace, is not a one way street, we have to accept generosity in order for its effect to be positive.

In today's scripture, we see the most amazing display of generosity by Jesus in the gospel account. Even before any food had been mentioned, Jesus is giving of himself. We are told that he has withdrawn to be alone, he even took a boat because he suspected he would struggle to get some quiet time. Just like a parent of toddlers, Jesus was pursued constantly, but not just by one or two, he was followed by the 12 and the other disciples whose number is unknown and probably fluctuated but from this group we know 70 deacons were appointed and the women were always with them, and Cleopas and the other disciple from the road to Emmaus were there from the beginning and there were lots of people from whom a replacement for Judas was voted, so it was always a bit chaotic for Jesus to go anywhere. Add to that the curious from nearby towns who saw the hullabaloo and came to see what it was all about, and no wonder Jesus needed some space from time to time. Yet we are told on this occasion he was followed and crowds gathered and waited on the shore and he took pity on them and went to them.

Here is the first display of generosity in this passage. Jesus went to the crowd, although he clearly hadn't wanted to, because he felt compassion. It wasn't logical, it was a knee-jerk reaction to seeing people in need, in need of healing, guidance and teaching. Jesus showed generosity in that he put the needs of complete strangers before his own, very reasonable, needs.

Then Jesus healed and taught, he didn't just do the bare minimum to satisfy the crowds, he healed all the sick and then spoke with them for a considerable time. It must have been longer than they expected because by the time he finished they were hungry and no one had thought to prepare for this encounter. If you leave the house for a quick walk around the block you don't pack a picnic, but if you know you are going to be away from home all day you make some provision. So Jesus was generous in that as well as consenting to an encounter with these people, he spent considerable time with them, more than even they expected.

Once they realised that they were far from home and without provision, Jesus does the obviously generous thing and provides them with food. From the meagre offering of 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish, Jesus provides a meal for 5000 men and additional women and children. It is a miracle, a tangible, logic defying miracle, but it speaks more deeply than the provision of a meal, it speaks of the whole nature of our

relationship with God. In that whatever we offer, he augments and multiplies it for the good of many. We approach God with so very little, and yet by his grace we can offer to those around us so much more. His love for us allows those gifts of the Spirit to grow within us and everyone benefits from the us which abounds in love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness and self –control. As we bear fruit from the seed of ourselves we offer to God, so we are generously transformed, just like that little meal.

Finally Jesus' generosity knows no limits. In the miracle not only did everyone eat their fill, but also there were 12 baskets of leftovers. 12 baskets! Even if they were little baskets, that's really something. Jesus gives us what we need and more. His style is one of radical generosity, which we really struggle to replicate in our human encounters and can struggle to truly accept from God.

We put conditions on our generosity, limits on how much or how often we feel we can respond. We justify those limits based on our circumstances and equally we find it hard to believe that God expects nothing back from us for his unlimited, unconditional generosity. But that is what grace truly is, unlimited, unconditional, unearned and unreciprocated.

Jesus fed everyone who was with him that day, many of them would bear no fruit for God in the long term, lots would have gone back to their homes after satisfying their curiosity about this preacher they had heard about, but still there is no discrimination. Come to me and be satisfied, is the offer he makes, and that offer still stands. Unbind yourself from thoughts of only accepting the generosity you can reciprocate and accept God's grace as you are, reciprocating all that you will receive by sharing it with those you will encounter in life, indiscriminately and without condition, just like Jesus did, because the closer we get to Christ in our actions the closer we will feel in our relationship with God.