Paraclesis *Coming alongside others*

St Francis' and St Mary's Churches, West Wickham

Sermon: Week 2 - The Feeding of the 5,000

Mark 6:31-44

Each Sunday as we come together it is an opportunity to meet with God and meaningfully come alongside others to support and help one another. The Church is called to be a paraclesis community.
As it says in Hebrews 10:25 (in the New International Reader's Version): *'let us not give up meeting together. Some are in the habit of doing this.*
Instead, let us encourage one another with words of hope. Let us do this even more as you see Christ's return approaching'.

The story of the feeding of the 5,000 from Mark's Gospel is significant. It is the only miracle that is recorded in all four Gospels. And it shows us how the disciples had an opportunity to come alongside others to care but, on this occasion, they got it wrong! The disciples suffered from Compassion deficit disorder. The disciples felt nothing, and so did nothing. They asked Jesus to *'Send them away'*.

In contrast to this lack of compassion, Jesus had a caring and compassionate ethos. Just look at Jesus' response to the crowd. He didn't see hungry or problem people, but 'sheep without a shepherd'. So what does He do?
He accepts them as they are. Acceptance is at the core of belonging. Love says you belong as you are, with all your needs.

He validates them – The disciples rejected this crowd; they disapproved of them being there. But Jesus acted in a way that told the crowd they were worth His time and care.

He reaches out to them – The disciples were dismissive, seeing them as too much of a burden, but Jesus invited them in, needs and all.
Compassion moves us inwardly. Whenever you read about Jesus journeying in the Gospels, you will see that He was moved with compassion. He came alongside and engaged with people – and miracles happened.

Compassion moves towards others and engages with needs. Jesus tells His disciples to take care of the people – feed them. In 1 John 3:17–18, in the Contemporary English Version Jesus says,

'If we have all we need and see one of our own people in need, we must have pity on that person, or else we cannot say we love God. Children, you show love for others by truly helping them, and not merely by talking about it'.

Compassion accepts responsibility for others – Jesus refuses to send these needy people away. When we see a need, we can choose to 'pass the buck' or accept responsibility.

Compassion gives no excuses – The disciples had excuses and we might have had them too if we were in their situation! Physically they had inadequate resources – so little to feed so many. But Jesus says 'I am the resource'.

Compassion places what we have in Jesus' hands – Jesus asks the disciples to tell Him what they had. Often, we are quick to talk about what we don't have, about what we can't do, but Jesus asks us: 'What do you have? Give it to me.'

Compassion draws on Christ's resources – The disciples bring the food to Jesus. See what happens: common bread in the miracle hands of Jesus becomes miracle bread.

Compassion reaches out to the point of felt need – after all *'they all ate and were filled'*. But Jesus doesn't feed the 5,000. He comes alongside the disciples and places bread and fish back in their hands. They then sit the people down in groups and come alongside them and feed them. That is what compassion does.

So whatever your experience, whatever you've got, give it to God and let Him take it in His miracle hands and drop His compassion into your heart. We long to see the miracle hand of God at work.

Let's build the paraclesis ethos into the heart of the culture of care within our church community.

As it says in the Message in 2 Corinthians 1:4 'He comes alongside us when we go through hard times, and before you know it, he brings us alongside someone else who is going through hard times so that we can be there for that person just as God was there for us'.