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*Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> August – The Eighth Sunday after Trinity*

*Readings: Romans 9:1-5 & Matthew 14:13-21*

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## **Romans 9:1-5**

I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit— I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

## **Matthew 14:13-21**

When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a remote place, and it’s already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.”

Jesus replied, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.”

“We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,” they answered.

“Bring them here to me,” he said. And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

## **Reflection**

One of the heart-warming aspects of Covid 19 has been all the stories we’ve heard of random acts of kindness shown by people of all ages and ethnicities towards those in need: people who’ve been supporting vulnerable neighbours; those volunteering at food banks; sending supportive texts or messages to connect with those who are isolated; or even synchronising watching a favourite TV show with someone who’s

shielding. The thing that all these examples has in common, of course, is compassion, and it is compassion that is the common thread running through our two readings this morning.

Paul's words at the beginning of chapter 9 are in stark contrast to the closing words of chapter 8 where he's proclaiming his certainty that the love of God offers salvation to all. They introduce a section in the letter that runs until the end of chapter 11 in which Paul addresses his concerns about his Jewish brothers and sisters, and explains how they fit into God's plan. And in these opening verses his heart is full of sadness as he despairs over the rejection of his message about Jesus by his own people, the Jews.

The Message Bible expresses Paul's heart of compassion for his own people clearly: 'They're my family. I grew up with them. They had everything going for them—family, glory, covenants, revelation, worship, promises, to say nothing of being the race that produced the Messiah, the Christ, who is God over everything, always.' Such is his anguish that he says he would be willing to be cursed by Jesus if it meant they could be blessed by him! Paul has a heart of compassion towards his people.

In a similar way, Jesus too, at the start of this passage has a heart beset by sadness. Like Paul, he's been rejected by the people in his home town of Nazareth at the end of chapter 13, then just before this episode, he's heard of the death of his cousin John the Baptist at the hands of Herod. So in his grief and sadness he seeks out a place to be on his own, only to find that the crowds have followed him.

But instead of reacting out of annoyance or frustration as we might, he's moved by compassion and focuses on their needs instead of his own, healing the sick. When his disciples finally approach him at the end of the day with the logical, intelligent suggestion that he dismiss the crowd so they may go find some food, Jesus answers, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." The story unfolds in a few compact actions. The disciples have only five loaves and two fish. Jesus says, "Bring them here to me." The crowd sits, and Jesus takes the food, blesses it, breaks it and gives it to the disciples, who then distribute it to the people. All are fed and filled.

Having hearts of compassion is something that should be at the centre of our service as Christians. When we look around us, see situations of need and reach out in any way we can – if we offer our time, our gifts, our money, our possessions, our talents, our sense of humour to help others – then Jesus blesses them, breaks them, multiplies them and gives them back to us so that we might pass them on to those that need them most. So may we all, this week, open our hearts to that compassion that we know in Jesus remembering his words in Matthew 25:40 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of this brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

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