

26th July, 2015.

Reading: John 6: 1 - 21

Sermon: Time for a Break

There are times in our lives when all of us need a break. It may just be a couple of hours that's needed, just a short time to get away from work or family or some other stress. A nice meal out or a walk in the country may be all that's required. In the other hand, it may be a day or a couple of days that's needed: a day's fishing, a bit of retail therapy or a night away having our meals cooked for us.

It may be a longer break that is needed, a holiday and a bit of sun, a sabbatical perhaps, a gap year for some of the younger folk, an opportunity to do something different, to experience life in a different culture and to soak up all that life has to offer. It may be time away to catch up with friends and simply to recharge our batteries and that's where I am right now. I need a break and time to recharge my batteries.

It is a sign of our humanity that we get stressed and we get tired and that we need time to recharge. It is a sign of our humanity that we need a break.

When we look at our Bible reading for today we see a very human side to Jesus. What we see is Jesus in need of a break. He has had constant demands on His time. He has been teaching, healing, reaching out to others, giving of Himself and He is tired.

At the beginning of the passage, we see Him heading across the lake with His friends, going only about four miles

away and heading up a mountainside, to relax but it wasn't to be.

The crowds could see where Jesus and His disciples were headed in the boat and so they followed Him on foot. They had heard so much about Him. They had seen what He was doing and had heard some of what He had to say. In the light of that, they were convinced He was the prophet who would be their King. They needed to get to Him to hear what else He had to say and to make Him their King.

The people were in need but as they quickly discovered, their needs were not going to be met in the way that they expected.

On a practical level, one of things they needed was food but they also needed food for their souls. Part of our passage focuses on the feeding of the five thousand but is there more to this story than meets the eye. There is great debate about what the miracle of the loaves and the fish actually means.

Was the miracle that the loaves and fish were changed into a huge amount of food by Jesus so that everyone could be fed? That is certainly the traditional understanding of the miracle and would have met the physical needs of the people but there is another way of looking at this story.

It is unlikely that all those people set out on a nine mile hike around the top of the lake without taking some provisions for the journey with them. The question is this. When Jesus took the loaves and the fish from the wee boy and blessed what He had and shared what He had, was that the miracle or did His actions bring about the miracle, one

which was perhaps to have lasting consequences and one which had more to do with supplying food for the souls of the crowd as well as food to satisfy their physical hunger?

Was the miracle that a group of men and women, who were going to keep their own food for themselves, was the miracle that they themselves were changed by the generosity of the child and of Jesus? Were the individuals in the crowd changed into individuals who were willing to share what they had with others, the end result being lots of food left over? That is another way of looking at this story.

That would be one of the greatest miracles of all time because that is what Jesus came to do, to change lives, to change our attitudes, to change our way of being. If He did that that day, that was truly a miracle.

How does what Jesus did that day impact on our lives? It has personal implications for those of us who have plenty and who know people who are struggling. It also has huge political implications for the feeding of those who have no food or very little food. Do we keep what we have for ourselves or do we learn to share more equally so that we all have enough, the rich and the poor? Should we be sharing what we have, just as Jesus did and as the wee boy did?

That is one way in which this story could impact on our lives and it would be a sign that miracles still happen, if others saw men and women changed into people capable of sharing with those who are in desperate need. People need to change before governments will change. it's very

easy to criticise politicians but change needs to start with us. As one or two start to share, that impacts on others and once the momentum gets going, there is no knowing where it will stop.

But there is another way in which this story could impact on our lives. It is one way that I don't really like to think about this as I prepare to head off on holiday!

What we see in that story is Jesus giving up His free time! Jesus had other plans for that afternoon as we saw, but He was still there for the crowd. He saw a need in them and He reached out despite His own needs and the needs of His disciples. He gave up His free time for others. What He did was He set an example for the crowd so that they might follow in His footsteps and do likewise.

How does that impact on us? Would we be prepared to cancel our plans for an afternoon or for a weekend away because of the needs of someone else, especially strangers? Or would we be like the crowd who initially sat there guarding what was their own? Maybe we need to see how Jesus reaches out to us before we will be able to reach out in that way to others.

What is interesting, though, is that Jesus was not saying that He could go without rest? He did not give up His rest indefinitely. He was not saying He was superman or that rest was unimportant. In fact, He demonstrated quite the opposite later in the day. He sent the disciples off on their own in the boat as evening approached and He spent time on His own, that same day.

By the time the crowds left, He didn't even want His friends around Him. He just wanted to be on His own for a while. There comes a point when we cannot give any more and it looks as if Jesus had reached that stage.

The crowd in the story got more than they bargained for when their attitude was transformed, but they didn't get what they wanted. Jesus set an example for them to follow but they had unrealistic expectations of Him. He couldn't be who they wanted Him to be. He couldn't be the king they had hoped for. He couldn't give them what they really wanted. He couldn't fulfil their dreams, as they stood. That was not who He was. They wanted to use Jesus for their own purposes but He had other plans, God's plans, which were far greater than any plans the crowd might have.

Part of that plan was revealed to His disciples once He was on the same shore as them once again and it is actually a thread which goes throughout this passage, although perhaps not immediately obviously. His final words to the disciples in that passage are: **It is I. Do not be afraid.**

At the beginning, Jesus and His friends went off in search of peace, peace from the stresses and strains of the demands which were being made on them.

In the middle section, when the crowd learned to share, there would be peace between them as opposed to a growing resentment between the haves and the have nots.

In the final section, Jesus found peace for Himself for a short while. He went on then to demonstrate to His friends that even in the midst of the storm, there is peace to be

found when we realise that Jesus is with us. Do not be afraid. It is me, Jesus, who is with you.

Wherever we are in the coming weeks, whether it is here in Lochgilphead or elsewhere, whether we are recharging our batteries or meeting the demands of the crowd that surrounds us, may we hear the same words as the disciples heard. It is I. Do not be afraid. In other words, be at peace. I am with you always.