

“The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.” So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things. When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went—into villages, towns or countryside—they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed.”

One of the things I hate about watching football these days is “Tempo footy” – where they hold the ball above their heads to say to each other: “We are so far behind, we are getting swamped, we are slowing the game down so that we can catch our breath and hopefully catch up. When our team does that it usually makes the score line worse not better! We pay or tune in to see the game played at frenetic pace, not to see it slowed down. Sometimes we play life flat out, frenetic and busy, so busy we can’t stop even if we want to, and we get swamped, overwhelmed by life’s demands and expectations. Sometimes we need a bit of tempo to slow things down and get some perspective on life. Footballer Jim Stynes who is suffering from cancer said this week: “I have let my life become overcomplicated and busy”. He is not alone. Sadly sometimes it takes sickness to slow us down so we regain some perspective on life.

The disciple Mark tells us people were coming and going all around them and they were coming and going too, so much coming and going that Jesus and his disciples had no time even to eat. That’s life today - so much running around and so many demands on us and our time we have no time to eat unless it’s fast food or microwavable. No time to eat with our own families let alone eating and drinking communion together with the family of God. Sadly many people are so busy that time out with Jesus and his friends on Sunday morning is seen as just another demand on an already busy life.

Jesus wasn’t afraid to slow things down occasionally. When he was ministering to people day and night, sick people, needy people he recognised he could not keep that up forever or it would overwhelm him. Remember Jesus was God but human, with human tiredness part of his life.

The disciples had just come back from a mission trip on a high. Jesus says **“Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest” (Mark 6:31)**. “Let’s get away to a quiet place, slow down, come down to earth, catch up.”

And that’s what the Sabbath was meant to be, what Sunday used to be and what today is meant to be - our weekly rest stop with Jesus in a hectic life. Time to leave the mobile at home, stop working and all our running around, stop our wandering restless minds for a while and gather around Jesus in a quiet place with his friends. We can’t hope to be effective in the kingdom, in the mission of God in the world without it. Jesus didn’t see himself as having to do be available to everyone all the time, be online and on-call everywhere and do everything or fix everyone. He knew when to switch the phone off and hang up the “gone fishing” sign.

But they didn’t even get to put a rod in the water because people showed up, all wanting something from Jesus, demanding, needy people. Jesus looked at the crowd but he didn’t get annoyed, didn’t say “go away!” or “Ok fellas turn the boat round we’ll have to find somewhere else”. No. Mark tells us: **“He had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd” (Mark 6:34)**

Compassion. Compassion is more than pity. It is more than feeling sorry for people. Compassion moves you – deep down, in fact the original Greek word suggests that to be moved with compassion is to be moved in your bowels! The Latin word means to “suffer with someone, to feel what they feel”. Compassion is more than a passing feeling of pity- it can be gut wrenching. What tugged at your heart strings this week? What got you in the guts? What moved you deep down as you watched and listened to people? When did not just your heart but your stomach go out to people in need?

What moved Jesus that day was more than the sight of hundreds of sick and hungry people. Jesus saw beyond their surface needs – having their ingrown toenails cured and their bellies filled. He saw that they looked so lost - running around aimlessly and exhausted. **“They were like sheep without a shepherd”** – someone they could trust in and not worry, who’d care for, help and guide them. He saw how much they needed him. We all need shepherds. Children need parents who care for their needs, including their spiritual needs. The Bible says wives need husbands who will love them as Christ loved the church, and everyone needs someone to help keep watch over their souls. What breaks God’s heart is sheep who are harassed, helpless, and lost. And the world is full of people like that, even people who appear healthy and well off on the outside but that’s not how it is in their souls.

And compassion for Jesus went beyond a feeling sympathy or pity and then reaching for the remote, or putting down the paper and moving on, rather it moved him towards people, it moved him to action. And what did he do first with these alone with these wandering, hungry, needy people? He taught them! **“He began teaching them many things” (v34)**. Now you would think Jesus would heal first, teach second, feed first, teach second. But no, he teaches first. His compassion moved him to tell them about God and life with him as their shepherd. Teaching about God puts perspective on our sicknesses, and our healings or lack of healing, and on our stressed lives. Jesus the faithful shepherd gives them God’s perspective on life, suffering, sin, sickness death, hunger, busyness and stress. Jesus taught, and then he fed the hungry, and later he healed the sick. Here in worship Jesus slows us down, forgives us, teaches us, and then hears our prayers for healing and then he feeds us, with himself. The teaching enables us to appreciate how we pray and how we eat here. Sometimes we underestimate the importance of teaching in the church today. We get a snack in a sermon but are too busy to read the word and study it on our own and together and for teaching. But our souls are the loser when we want to rush to the healing and feeding and all our needs being met but don’t think listening to Jesus is important.

Teaching, feeding and healing – that’s what the compassionate Jesus did. He saw with his heart and he spoke and he acted in love. He even let it interrupt his rest time. But Jesus knew he couldn’t save the world by healing and fixing each of us one by one. That would take forever and it was only a band-aid anyway. No, he knew he would ultimately heal and save the world not by running around madly trying to do everything but by doing nothing but hang on a cross. Dying would be his ultimate contribution to the world, his greatest act of compassion. There he would identify with our deepest problem – our sin and all its consequences. There he would take it all away in one great act of compassion.

It’s kind of safe watching the world on TV or the computer, from a distance. It’s harder to have compassion for people closer to home, in person. We are too busy, we have our own problems, and we often judge other peoples’ problems as of their own making. We are often repelled by people with needs, not moved towards them. But Jesus had compassion on all people, not just the ones with the saddest stories to tell. He saw how lost and broken we all are.

We don’t have to save the world this week – Jesus did that by doing nothing but hang on a cross. We are called to look at and listen to the crowd with him, to be moved with him to respond in loving compassion, sometimes to teach, sometimes to feed and heal, sometimes just to hang in there and bear a cross with someone, and to trust it will be enough to draw them closer to Jesus. Sometimes you will give generously with money, sometimes physical help, sometimes a listening ear, sometimes you will write to the government in protest or on behalf of others, sometimes you’ll send a card to someone you don’t even know, sometimes all we can do is call Jesus in prayer and see if he can help because we can’t, we’re spent. In fact that is the best thing we can do anyway – call on the compassionate Jesus for others I pray.

Today in our frenetic lives Jesus calls to “tempo christianity” - to slow down and refresh with him and his teaching before we pick up the pace again and go out of here with his compassion to care for and shepherd people in his name. May we see this and every time spent with him as precious and vital if we are to be compassionate and effective in our work for him.