**The Revd Dr Ian McIntosh, Director of Mission and Ministry, reflects on Mark 6:30-34, 53-end for the Eighth Sunday after Trinity, 21st July.**

One of the phrases being used to describe the new government is that they've ‘hit the ground running’. This phrase picks up widely held expectations that those who are newly elected will make a quick and decisive impact. After all, they've been waiting for a long time to put cherished plans into action. The phrase is often used too of other ‘new starts’, and many of us will have used these words to describe a new ministry in the Church, with all the hope and eager expectations that come along with it.

In today's gospel, we come face to face with Jesus, who, in regard to hitting the ground running, has a rather different and counter-cultural take on life. Here, we are confronted with a picture of Jesus, surrounded by many opportunities to make an impact - very hungry and very sick people being two of them - but who chooses a very different pattern of life. To use the words of the author John Mark Comer, “One which is marked by retreat and return.”

Or, to use another phrase, Jesus does not seem to hurry or to rush. Yes, of course, Jesus’s life and ministry are marked by impact. These verses surround one of the most famous miracle stories, the feeding of the 5000, and what an impact that was on all caught up in that event. There are people clamouring to see Jesus and simply to touch the hem of his garment.

And yet, here Jesus deliberately takes time to pause, to rest, to find a space with his disciples to retreat before he returns to those who are in need. “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while,” is what Jesus says as he puts that into action by going away on the boat. And I don't think this act is meant to be separate from his teaching and healing.

Our modern world teaches us often that we work and work, and we use rest to simply recover from that overwork. Whereas for Jesus, he models something different. He has a rhythm to his life. Rest, recreation, prayer, space, time to eat, all found as part of Jesus’s whole-life pattern of love for God, love for neighbour, and love for the whole creation.

And this rhythm is deeply motivated by Jesus’s service of others. We learn in these verses of Jesus’s compassion, where the word used to describe that is something about being deeply moved in the guts, seeing the people he cared for lacked direction and fulfilment in the life that he could offer them. But I wonder whether that compassion is equally seen in the way in which Jesus cares for his closest friends, and indeed for himself, as he takes time to rest. He does not simply mimic the hurrying and chaos around him, but he chooses a pattern of retreat and return.

We have in this diocese a Rhythm of Life, and one of its practices is to establish daily patterns of rest, and I’m very grateful to Sammy Tooze, our discipleship adviser, for her deliberate use of this phrase, ‘daily patterns of rest’. It's a phrase to challenge each of us to find within each day a pattern of life which includes some space to rest, to slow, to pause, even if it's just five minutes at a time. This is a radical act. It lies at the heart of being a disciple. It embodies the values of Jesus's kingdom, and it is a lovely way of subverting the norms of hurrying and rushing around. So why not try to not hit the ground running, but to hit the ground prayerfully and restfully?

Let us pray.

Loving God, we thank you for the challenging example of the life of your Son, Jesus Christ, who invites us to enter the rest that you heralded by making our creation and resting on the seventh day. Teach us deeply what it is to take Sabbath, to be recreated and remade in your image. Teach us daily what it is to rest, as well as to work, and to play. In Christ's name we ask it. Amen.