

I want us to do three things as we reflect on this passage

First, we'll zoom *out* and see how these verses give us a glimpse of threads that run right through the scriptures

Second, we'll zoom in – and focus on those verbs at the heart of this narrative – where we are told Jesus TAKES, GIVES THANKS, BREAKS AND GIVES the bread

Thirdly, we'll ask the question that we should always ask - 'so what?' - what relevance does this account of what happened a couple of millennia ago have for us. What difference might it make – how might it change or inspire or challenge us?

So first let's zoom out. Because in Jesus saying 'I have compassion' and in Jesus providing food for the hungry crowd – there is a resonance with themes that run throughout the bible

We've already been reminded by others who've preached in recent weeks – that the miracles the Gospels record are 'Signs' – pointers to *who* Jesus is ... he opens the eyes of the blind and says I am the light of the world, he feeds the hungry and says I am the bread of life

He does what we read in today's passage because it is who he is.

I know some of you are studying the names of God. I don't know which ones you've looked at so far, but an important one in the OT is Jehovah Jirah – meaning the Lord will provide

And another is El Rakhum – meaning 'God is compassionate' –

and here in today's passage we find Jesus saying I have compassion for these people – and then responding to their hunger.

For many of this crowd and for those who were watching the ministry of Jesus unfold and wondering about his identity and significance – his actions, his words, the signs that these combined to present would have had echoes of what they knew about God.

The compassion of God runs like a golden thread through the Bible

Think of the exodus – where we read about God's compassion on his people in slavery – he hears their cries and responds in compassion.

That golden thread runs throughout the prophets

Isaiah 49:10, 13 (in one of many similar passages) says:

‘They will neither hunger nor thirst, nor will the desert heat or the sun beat down on them. He who has compassion on them will guide them and lead them beside springs of water.

Shout for joy, you heavens; rejoice, you earth; burst into song, you mountains! For the Lord comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones.’

Many of the people who were listening would have been really familiar with these scriptures

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The psalms – the songs and poems they would have sung and recited – are full of compassion:

‘As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him.’ — Psalm 103:13

‘The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.’ — Psalm 145:8-9

It goes on and on ... And this continuous seam of affirmations of God's compassion is regularly punctuated with examples of God acting to provide for – and at times – feed people. His compassion not only moved him to *rescue* the slaves from Egypt – day after day in the wilderness he provided for them – gave them manna – *enough for each day*

So when we zoom out and see today's passage in the light of the whole of scripture – and we've only scratched the surface of that – we realise that this doesn't just ring a bell with a similar incident in the ministry of Jesus – but it is entirely in harmony with what we know of who God is. Jesus does what he does and says what he says because this is who he is:

So now let's zoom in

Just as elements of today's text cause us to look *back* and see how the very character and identity of God, is seen in Jesus ... so, as we zoom *in* and reflect on that little collection of

verbs at the heart of this narrative – where we are told that Jesus TAKES, GIVES THANKS, BREAKS AND GIVES the bread – our minds are taken *forward* to a later incident – an event which in a few minutes we’re going to commemorate – his final meal with his closest friends and followers – when again we are told that he ‘took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to them ... saying ‘take and eat ... this is my body ... GIVEN FOR YOU’

– in a few minutes we are going to *participate* in a miracle – as we eat and drink together – not only are WE united from behind our zoom screens, but we are united with the whole church – with believers in Afghanistan and Zambia and in every corner of the planet – and throughout eternity

We’ve recently been asking ourselves what does it mean to be church in this place at this time – and as we do that we find that the NT is full of metaphors for who and what God wants us to be and do – not least we are the ‘body of Christ’ – and when we reflect on that we find that *we* are taken, blessed, broken (you might find that bit disturbing, but I’ll explain in a moment), and given to the world?

Taken speaks of our choseness – not in an exclusive way, but you and I are part of the family of God’s beloved children, bought at a price, adopted, redeemed, forgiven. Jesus has taken you – and day by day he takes you. And each day we are invited to *take* life as it comes to us –to prayerfully, consciously, take it

Jesus gives thanks for and blesses those he calls

And we are invited to take ... life ... *with thanksgiving, with gratitude*. Life takes on a new value and purpose when we take it as a gift from God. One of the great things of being Christian is knowing who to thank. knowing our creator allows us to turn gratitude into praise.

And when we express – gratitude, thanksgiving, praise – we don’t just convey our appreciation for a gift – it adds to it and completes it. C.S. Lewis wrote about how ‘Our thanksgiving and praise is the consummation [in other words the fulfilment or completion] of our enjoyment of God’s gifts.’ So to *fully* enter into the joy we need to give thanks.

It does us a lot of good to be grateful. When we are feeling down it can be hard to bring to mind things for which we are grateful – especially if part of our particular brokenness is that we battle depression, it can be really difficult. But when we *can* turn our minds and heart to

giving thanks and praise – joy begins to seep in through the cracks – our spirits are lifted – our perspective changes – as we begin to recognise ourselves as people who are loved by God

Let's think about Jesus breaking the bread.

Bread that remains unbroken is of no use to anyone. It is inaccessible. Breaking – speaks not of damaging, but of opening up - only once the bread is broken can he say 'take, eat, this is for you'.

Brokenness then is what makes the giving and sharing possible. Breaking and giving are kind of one action. **Giving**, sharing becomes possible through breaking

So what? You might ask. What relevance or what difference might the things we've glimpsed as we've zoomed out and zoomed in make to us today, next week ...

Well, those threads of compassion and provision that we see running through the bible, also run out beyond – out of the scriptures - to us - and into the future. In Jesus saying to his disciples 'as the father sent me so I send you' we too are called to be compassionate – to allow the spirit of Christ to grow his compassion in us and lead us into compassionate living.

We are called – taken by God – and it is the combination of our brokenness and our blessedness – that makes God within us accessible to others. It is tempting to offer our blessedness and hide our brokenness, but that lacks integrity – people see God at work where brokenness and blessedness come together.

When Jesus saw Two blind men sitting by the roadside, and the crowd that were with him rebuked them for shouting out ... we're told that Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him.

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.

When Jesus heard about the beheading of John the Baptist we're told, '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.'

Who or What might we encounter this week that might arouse compassion in us. When we're attentive to his spirit within us, what opportunities might arise for us to be taken, blessed, broken and given – to be agents of God's compassion

Jesus did what he did and said what he said because that is who he was. He was the incarnation, the embodiment, of Jehovajh Jirah and El Rakhum – god the provider and the compassionate God.

Hear again the words of Jesus: 'As the Father sent me, so I send you'.

If you know the compassion of Jesus – go and embody his compassion. If you know the provision and generosity of God, go and be a channel of God's grace and generosity to others.

Let's be quiet for a moment – respond to God in our own ways - and then Lynne's going to lead us in some sung response to these thoughts.