

Lord of life. Help us to know how to be your disciples today, tomorrow, in this daunting COVID world. Amen.

Good morning. Albert Einstein once said there are only two ways to live your life: one is as if nothing is a miracle, and one is as if everything is a miracle. Albert, I would take issue with you on just one word in that. In fact, just one letter. I don't think we need the indefinite article. I think we are to live as though everything is miracle.

Miracles aren't separate isolated incidents. The feeding of the 5000 is miracle. Small resources, given to, and blessed by, Jesus, become more than enough.

Miracle plays out the principles of the parables of the kingdom that we've been hearing about over the last few weeks. God builds the significant, from the insignificant.

In the economy of the world five small barley loaves and two fish are barely enough to feed a family. In the economy of God's kingdom, it becomes more than enough to feed a multitude. And that multitude reminds us that all are part of God's family.

No miracle is the very nature of God's kingdom, often referred to as the signs of the kingdom in the Bible. This is no compartmentalised wonder story. Just look where Matthew places it in his Gospel: straight after the violent killing of John the Baptist.

Jesus hears the news of John's death and is filled with grief. In common parlance we would probably say he was devastated. So Matthew contrasts the story of John's death at the hands of Herod, with this miracle of life in the hands of Jesus.

As ever, death and life are intertwined. "In the midst of life we are in death": wise words from the prayer book burial service that speak into these pandemic days.

So Jesus, hurting from the news of John's death, takes himself off to grieve privately. But even before social media news spread fast. Crowds gathered to be near Jesus and, even in his grief, he had compassion on them. Healed, prayed, loved them, till he was tired, and they were hungry.

His Disciples, ever the bodyguard protectors of their Rabbi, urged Jesus to send them away; send them to find food for themselves in the local towns and villages. But Jesus saw a double opportunity here: to show himself as the new Moses, through whom god would feed his people, and to teach his Disciples compassion and trust.

He shocked that band of young men, and yes they were young men: some of them probably still in their teens; as he shocked us now, as we to hear that challenge that he issued to those who would be his Disciples: you, give them something to eat.

They were daunted by the size of the crowd; who wouldn't be? They were daunted by the task. I must confess to a silly moment, when I was trying to picture the scene of Jesus organising this great crowd, to sit down on the grass in groups. I imagined two-metre social distancing; I imagined hand sanitising stations around the place; I imagined the Disciples, before they ever distributed the food, going around saying "have you washed your hands?"!

But soon that silly moment changed in my imagination to seeing different crowds: crowds of refugees, jostling for a place in a flimsy boat, to try to reach a place of safety and sanctuary; and an overcrowded transit camp for thousands, sometimes hundreds of thousands, of men, women and children, who have had to flee from death, and have yet to find life.

Yes, those Disciples were daunted by the task. We are daunted by the challenge of living in a world already in pain, now overtaken by a global pandemic. But miracle is the nature of God's kingdom.

We long to get back to normal don't we?: A vain longing. We can never go back. With God the direction is always forward and through.

We long to be able to withdraw into our safe little haven of church, of England, but we can't. We are part of God's global family, and as Disciples of Jesus we are part of God's solution. And that solution is about compassion in the midst of grief.

So what does it mean to be a Disciple of Jesus right now, in this strange and ever-changing land of Coronavirus in which we find ourselves?

Firstly, being a Disciple means to let compassion rise out of grief and loss, to learn from our Lord - the man of sorrows - who is acquainted with grief. Secondly, it means to be willing to listen, to heed, and to trust; when you sense that God nudge you do something about it.

We need to learn to trust the God of miracle. But thirdly we need to hear carefully what that challenge is about. You do something about it. That we don't mistake it for a personal, individual one. That you or I alone can, or should, solve the world's problems. No, the challenge is a corporate one: we are called to be Disciples. As a corporate one as it was to those 12 to feed the crowd. So we need to talk together; pray together; we Disciples of Christ.

And we need to remember too that we are workers together with Christ.

The Disciples mustered what resources they could; then they gave them to Jesus, who blessed not only the bread and the fish, but also the Disciples task of distribution. The miracle was in this interaction with Jesus, so let's be Disciples who live in the kingdom of miracle, and trust that God can do it. Maybe, through us.

May God bless you as you dig deeper into what it means to be a Disciple of Jesus.

Amen.