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Sermon 3rd August 2014

Jacob was travelling home after 14 years exile, plus 2 wives, 2 other ladies, numerous children, flocks and herds, hoping his brother Esau would have forgiven him. He has seen angels and believes that God is with him. Then that night, Jacob, left alone on the other side of the river has a very disturbed night, wrestling with God? An angel? Persisting until he is blessed.

We move to Paul wrestling with his Jewishness and his fellow Jews. Paul's pain is tangible, Chapter 8 of his letter to the Romans had ended with that assurance that nothing can 'separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord' but now he struggles. Somehow, God's beloved people who had received so much from God were unable to see the reality of the Messiah. He says he would give his life for them if only they could believe.

Jesus himself wrestling with his dismay at John's death, his own need for rest and recovery. But is followed by crowds.

I too have wrestled with God, my faith, perhaps we all have. As Jacob will find and Paul as he works through his pain these are often profound moments in our spiritual journeys. Often we want to tie God down, we want our needs met in our way. But we have to trust in God's generosity and mercy and rely only on him, not ourselves.

Jesus, despite his own needs not being met, turns in compassion to the crowds who have followed him and heals the sick. The day is ending, people are hungry and tired, probably including the disciples. They ask him to send the crowds away so that they can get food. However he asks something of his disciples, "You feed them". All he actually needed was one small response, the 5 loaves and 2 fish, given that he will make it feed 5,000. He needs our response. "You feed them" is only daunting if you don't trust in the generosity of God.

God can and will sustain us if we let him. If we approach him, understanding that we have nothing without him, he will fill us and with some to spare. And this is the crunch, we are fed and so we must feed, knowing that God will always replenish us.

However little we feel we have to offer, whether in time, talents or money, God will take what we have and multiply it for his use. In both stories of feeding thousands, Jesus takes a little and provides more than is needed.

We will be fed with the bread of life at the Communion table this morning, when asked to "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord" we will answer "In the name of Christ". How will we feed others? How will we let God use and multiply all that we have to offer to serve the Lord our God?

We all know the story of the butterfly flapping its wings, we have all seen the ripples spread out in a pond when a stone is dropped in. One act will have profound effects, probably effects that we will never know about, but is part of God's great plan. One act offering time, talents, money or the Good News is a challenge for us all this week.

However much, or whatever we are wrestling with, this week let us have the compassion of Jesus for others, let us trust God's generosity to do more with whatever we have to give than we could ever imagine, let us be fed by his love for us and feed that love to others.