



Dear friends,

August is a strange month in Methodism. It is as if Jesus has said to his disciples 'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.'...and yet 'many [*jobs, tasks and demands*] saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them'...(Mark 6:31, 33 – ish!).

We have a folk memory of August being the 'quiet time', the time when nothing happens because there are no meetings scheduled and everyone is on holiday. It hasn't really been like that for quite some years, but this year, when we are all weary from the additional challenges of Covid-19, when we need to come to terms with yet another round of changes, when our vulnerability is high, many of us are maybe longing for the August of our collective memory. And it is not there for us in the way we wish.

So what will we do?

At this point it is tempting to take the next part of Mark 6 as my guide, to point to the feeding of more than five thousand people with just a few morsels of food, to say that with God there is always enough. And I believe that with God there *is* always enough. There is always enough for what God intends...and we must listen carefully, so that we are partners in that intending...which will be towards flourishing, towards life.

But when we long for the August of our dreams it is perhaps important to pick out another portion of this text to hold on to...Jesus saw the great crowd and 'had compassion on them'. To have compassion is literally to 'suffer with', and it is from that place of 'suffering with' that Jesus both teaches and feeds the crowd. In the personal and corporate disorientation that I think many of us are still experiencing, Jesus is among us, teaching us and feeding us. Because it is not only the crowds, but the disciples too who know Jesus 'with' them as Mark 6 unfolds.

I have three pictures on the wall above my desk (we might notice that on Zoom we only tend to see what a person chooses to have behind them, and not what they choose to keep in their own eye-line!). One is a photograph of a statue of a woman, sitting serenely, hands open, on an islet in the centre of a pool. One is the Westcott Icon (<https://www.westcott.cam.ac.uk/the-westcott-icon/>).

The final picture is one which was painted for my mother...reproduced badly here. Caught out of the corner of my eye one day, in the midst of a conversation about my need of 'God with me', they together became a window into the reality that God is with me always, in both expected and unexpected ways.

As this Summer unfolds, I pray that you will know Jesus' compassion and God's abundant love – whether August holds for you unwelcome busy-ness, creative purpose or rest and recreation.



Peace, Jo