



## Christmas Appeal LifeLink Launch 2018

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The first of tonight's gospel passages, from Saint Matthew's Gospel, speaks of Jesus's great concern for the people he encountered as he traveled through all the towns and villages because the people were, as Saint Matthew puts it, harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus's response was to talk about the need for labourers to bring in the harvest. "*The harvest is plentiful,*" he laments, "*but the labourers are few*". With these words, it seems to me, Jesus was sketching out what the mission of his Church would be: to look for the harassed and dejected and go out to them in their need with the same concern which Jesus showed, and the same sensitivity to their suffering: to see, in other words, as Jesus saw and to act as Jesus acted. It's not a bad description of what discipleship is all about.

Our second gospel passage this evening picks up the same theme. Those who in the parable are described as hungry, or thirsty, or naked, or sick or in prison are all in one way or another harassed and dejected, very much like sheep without a shepherd. They need someone to reach out to them, to care for them, to meet them with love and respect. And when we do, as this second passage makes clear, we are reaching out to Christ for he is as surely in those who suffer as he is in our churches, in our tabernacles, and in our times of prayer.

There is another passage from St Matthew's gospel which also focuses on the same theme and which in a sense can help us tie together the two gospel passages to which we have listened this evening. It is the story of the feeding of the five thousand. On that occasion too people were harassed and dejected, hungry and thirsty. Jesus asks his disciples to feed them but the disciples, overwhelmed by the enormity of the task, tell Jesus that they can only find five loaves of bread and two fish. Jesus tells them to bring what they have to him. He blesses the bread and the fish – this meagre and insignificant contribution – and then, crucially, gives the bread and the fish back to the disciples and tells them to feed the people. And there is more than enough. Jesus sends us out in his name to reach out to those in need – but he does so with the promise of his transforming grace at work within us.

If we reflect on each of these stories in the light of the others, some key ideas emerge, at least for me.



Firstly, like Jesus in the first story, we need to be people who are sensitive enough to recognise the signs of harassment and dejection, of hunger and thirst, of loneliness and despair in others. If we keep our eyes averted, if we keep the eyes of our hearts closed, we will not even notice the desperation in people's lives, a desperation which is often quite deliberately hidden. We will also need to have that sense of urgency that the harvest is waiting and needs to be brought in, and that if we don't do it, perhaps no-one else will. If we don't feed the hungry, we who claim to be disciples of Jesus, who will? If we don't offer a listening ear to those who are lonely, or despairing, we who claim to be disciples of Jesus, who will?

But we will need to be realistic. The needs are great and we must certainly do all we can. We are called to reach out with generosity and large-heartedness. But among the things we can do, and I would say must do if we wish to succeed, we must bring what little we have to Jesus, recognising our limitations, and place everything confidently in his hands, trusting that, in his own time and in his own way he will transform the little that we offer into an abundance which can meet the needs of God's people. By placing God exactly where he belongs in our lives as individuals, as families and as Christian communities, we will find our hearts expanded, our eyes opened and our fears and hesitations transformed into boldness and determination.

This evening as we launch this year's Christmas LifeLink appeal let us pray for each other, and for all our brothers and sisters in the Archdiocese of Perth, that we can see with the eyes of Jesus, listen with the ears of Jesus, speak with the voice of Jesus and love with the heart of Jesus. And if we can, then no-one need go hungry, or thirsty or naked. No one need be abandoned in prison or left in a hospital or nursing home with no-one to visit them. No-one need feel harassed or dejected, forgotten or abandoned. Through our efforts for Lifelink this year let us equip the army of people in our Church who reach out to those in need with all that they need to bring the practical love of Christ into the lives of anyone who needs to experience this love at this holy time.