

Reading: Mark 6:30-34,53-56

Open the Gospel to us in fresh and encouraging way. In Jesus name we ask this.

Last weekend I had the pleasure of taking my daughter's wedding. Not everyone can say they married their daughter! Anyway, I did. But it didn't come easy. I have always said that I wouldn't do the baptisms, weddings, and funerals of close family members. I have seen old priests who never get a chance to be dad or mum at family occasions. I was praying when the text came through asking if I would marry them. I got to thinking with God's help, "Why am I limiting myself?" I thought. "Could I enlarge my caring just a bit? What's stopping me?" I realised that I was worried I would burst into tears. Then I thought "Who cares anyway? It might add pathos to the ceremony." So I did it. I celebrated the marriage. And as soon as it was over, I took off my robes, put my suit on and became Dad again.

All of us have limits that we put on our caring for others, some of them helpful and some of them unhelpful.

If Jesus had a medical condition, I think it would be an enlarged heart. We see his enlarged heart in action very much in today's Gospel.

At least three times his capacity for heartfelt compassion is evident.

In verse 30 the apostles are gathered around Jesus telling him all they have done and taught. His first response is to want to care for them with compassion. "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." Jesus wants the disciples to care for themselves and to go on retreat.

The second time he responds with an enlarged heart it would be hard to miss. The Gospel writer even uses the word compassion. In verse 34 we read that great crowd followed him and "he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd."

The third time, we could easily miss that Jesus responds with a heart of compassion. In verse 53 Mark records for us that Jesus crossed over to the other side of the lake. We could read this and think nothing of it. But for the first audience of the Gospel, it was highly significant. Jesus was going into Gentile territory. No longer was the message of God's love just for the Jew but it was for everyone. Jesus was revealing his enlarged heart and his vision.

Deep inside all of us is this God-given capacity to love and be loved. This is what makes us human.

And God is always gently leading us into an enlarged heart to further give of ourselves to others.

In our calendar of saints, the church remembered Henry Williams on Friday. He is a good example of a person whose heart got enlarged by God.

Born in 1792, he entered the navy at the age of fourteen and served in the Napoleonic Wars. His part in a duel between two ships, in which there was great loss of life, convinced him of the futility of fighting and enlarged his heart to that of peacemaker. When Henry and Marianne Williams arrived in the Bay of Islands in 1823, Paihia became the centre for the first real spread of the gospel. Henry immediately became the acknowledged leader of the missionary team. The missionary team made a concerted effort to master the Māori language, and the translation of the Scriptures and the Prayer Book was carried forward. Schools were established in the Bay of Islands and every opportunity was taken to speak about the way of salvation. When visiting a marae, Henry would be engaged in tending the sick, in preaching, and in conversations which would often continue far into the night. His courage and warm regard for people eventually won respect and affection. He was to gain a reputation for stepping fearlessly between armed and angry opponents and persuading them to a better way. Throughout the next ten years the influence of the mission spread. Journeys of exploration by sea and on foot into the Thames district, the Waikato and the Bay of Plenty led to the establishment of a missionary team in a number of new stations.

The arrival of colonists brought by the New Zealand Company heralded a stormy period in Henry Williams' life. He strongly supported the Treaty of Waitangi, seeing the rule of British law as a protection against unscrupulous land deals and general lawlessness. He was responsible for the Māori translation. He and other missionaries travelled widely, interpreting the Treaty of Waitangi, and seeking the signatures of chiefs away from the Bay of Islands.

Henry's heart had been enlarged such that he always had the needs of Māori foremost and he was very concerned over the alienation of Māori land and over the methods of the New Zealand Company and the Governor. Governor Grey tried in vain to get rid of him, finding Williams's great mana among the tribes an obstacle. Henry Williams died as he had lived preaching a Gospel of peace and advocating for the needs of Māori.

He died on 16 July 1867. A church in Paihia was built in his memory. And at this church a stone cross was erected by Māori as a memorial to him. It reads: *A memorial to Henry Williams. A token of love to him from the Māori Church. He was a father indeed to all the tribes, a courageous man who made peace in the Māori Wars. For 44 years he sowed the Good News in this island. He came in the year 1823. He was taken away in the year 1867.*

Fifteen hundred years earlier St Augustine wrote a prayer to God, recognising his need of an enlarged heart. "O God," he wrote. "My soul is too narrow for you to come in, let it be enlarged by you. It is in ruins, please restore my soul."

I wonder how God is enlarging your heart of love. Mine was to take our daughter's wedding. What about you?

Jesus of Galilee, Henry Williams, Augustine of Hippo, and now us.

Enlarge our souls O God to make room for You, and then we will have room enough for others as well.