

Ask me one day about the Sunday I preached to Charles Spencer the brother of Princess Diana. Only months after her death. Ask me about the reaction of the congregation when he came from the back of the church to receive Communion. Do you have a 'being in the presence of greatness story'? If not, you do now. Today you are in the presence of greatness. Face to face with greatness through Dr Luke's account of the miraculous feeding of a very large crowd. By Jesus, the Christ. Greatness seen in his powerful, grace-filled provision of a hearty meal. With five loaves and two fish for a hungry crowd of over 5000 people.. *'They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.'* **v17** Nothing short of an act of creation. The writer to the Hebrews describes the creation of the universe in this way. *'By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.'* **Hebrews 11:3** Echoes of the creation of the universe in Jesus' creative action here. His powerful provision for the physical hunger of the crowd pointing to an act of divine provision centuries before. God raining down manna and quail from heaven to satisfy the hunger of the grumbling Israelites in the wilderness. Hear what God says, *"I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, 'At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.'"* **Exodus 16:12** Jesus keeps providing basket loads of bread and fish for the apostles to distribute. Similar to what God did in the wilderness. Jesus laying before the apostles, King Herod, the large crowd more and more evidence about his identity. Whispers here of, *'then you will know that I am the LORD your God.'* Brothers and sisters, can you see? You are in the presence of greatness: God in human flesh. You are a witness, through the pages of Scripture, to that greatness. Also, a witness to something of cosmic and personal significance. Often overlooked in this story. Summed up in three words in **v11**. *'he (Jesus) welcomed them'*. A glaring contrast here. Between Jesus and the apostles. They want to send the crowd away. Slow learners the apostles. They relied on the welcome of others for their daily provision. During their recently concluded missionary journey. Sisters and brothers, are you like Jesus or the apostles? Offering welcome. Or turning your back on those who fail to meet your standards. Who threaten your comfort zone? What an affront to the one who welcomes us when we fail to welcome those made in his image. Christians live in the presence of greatness moment by moment. Enjoying

absolute security through Jesus' forgiveness and finished work on the Cross. The people amongst whom we live need the welcome of Jesus. In a changing world where assurances of security are being stripped away people need the welcome of Jesus. Received in the person of Jesus. Are we offering Jesus through genuine welcome in his name? In this passage we see the character of divine welcome on display. Gift to all people. Model for Christians. *'He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing'*. **v11** Divine welcome is an invitation. To belong to the Kingdom of God. To know wholeness. To enjoy the satisfaction of which the substantial evening meal is a foretaste. The divine heart behind divine welcome captured in Mark's account of this event. *'When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.'* **Mark 6:34** Jesus sees men, women and children in their thousands going to extraordinary lengths to follow him around. Deep compassion wells up in him. Their lostness weighing heavily on the divine heart. Sickness and hunger a symptom of their greatest need. A good shepherd to protect them, feed them, bring them home. Great danger without that shepherd. At risk of being devoured by the evil one. Wandering without the meaning and purpose for which they were created. Cut off from genuine connection with their Creator. The apostles want to send these lost sheep away. Not Jesus. He welcomes them. Who is he welcoming? People broken and needy. Potentially amongst the crowd: perpetrators and victims of violence and abuse; of words that shame and diminish. People struggling with their sexuality; with rage and hatred; depression, mental illness, addiction. People dealing with lack of work, personal dignity; with sickness, grief, crippling fear, greed, betrayal in relationships, loneliness, isolation, rejection. Each man, woman and child in that crowd tasting the bitter fruit of the Garden of Eden. Instead of fruit from the tree of life. Now standing in the presence of greatness in a remote place near Bethsaida. Experiencing the invitation of divine welcome. Jesus speaking of the Kingdom of God, healing bodies, feeding empty stomachs. Holding out something deeper, richer, eternal as they respond to the invitation to taste all that God offers. Sisters and brothers, we are in that crowd. Their life story represents ours. We too bear the scars from life in a broken world. We too need the connection with our Creator only Jesus offers. We too need to know the divine welcome. Did you recognise the good news from the passage? The invitation of divine welcome still open. The offer of forgiveness, food for the soul, healing and hope, the

undoing of the impact of the Garden. Still available, whatever the condition of your heart. Whatever your life story. Wherever you are watching this morning. Jesus welcomes you without precondition or limit. Instead of simply affirming our captivity to sin; leaving us in our bondage. He offers to break the power of sin in our lives. To reconstruct the image of God in us. He invites us to experience a fresh start, a new birth, through the cleansing of divine forgiveness. He welcomes us into citizenship in a kingdom different from this world. An eternal kingdom. Under the rule of the perfect King. King Jesus. As citizens of that kingdom, he calls us to obey and serve him as King. The Apostle Paul bears testimony to the transforming power of the divine welcome. Listen to his testimony, *'I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.'* **1**

Timothy 1:12-15 There is a divine welcome with your name on it. I praise God if you have received Jesus' welcome. Live with joy the abundant life you have received. Make known the divine welcome to others. If your heart aches for the welcome of Jesus, he will not turn you away. There is nothing Jesus will not do to enhance your ultimate wellbeing and satisfaction. He will withhold nothing from you that is good for you He is sufficient for anything you face. Receive his welcome this day. Turn to him in repentance and faith. When you take that step in your life, let us know here at Northern Beaches Anglicans. We want to connect with you or help you connect with a church near you that will encourage you to live faithfully in Jesus' kingdom.