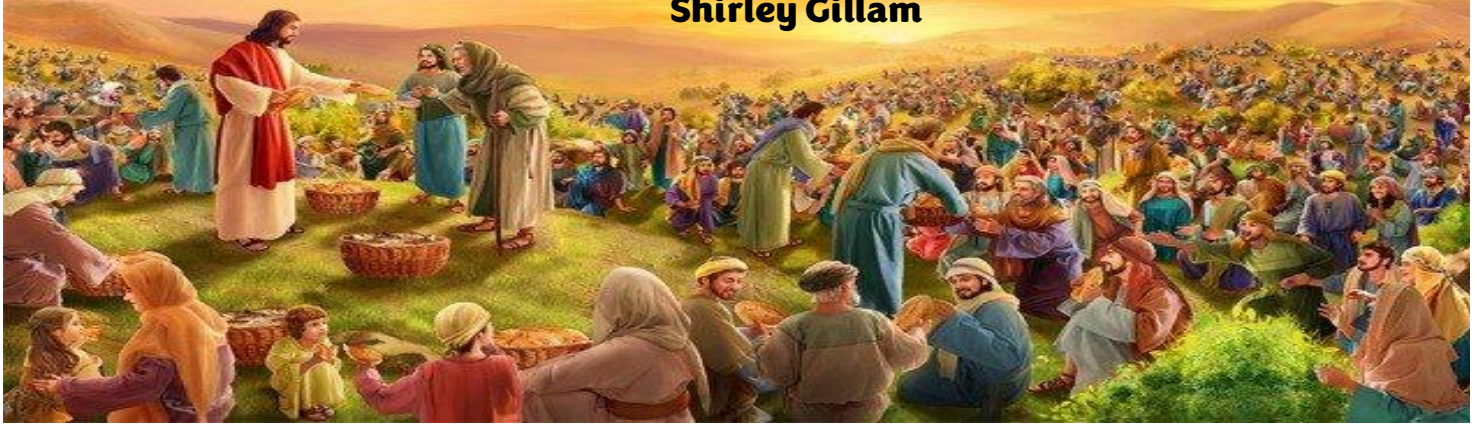
The Westbury Baptist Sunday Message
An Imaginary Patient and Hospitality for the 5,000

September 13
Shirley Gillam



Shirley shared a little bit about Chaplaincy Services and showed how prayer, practical help and compassionate pastoral care can make a real difference in the lives of people who are suffering. She talked about several patients whom she condensed into one imaginary patient named Duki. He entered hospital with addictions and related health problems, feeling ashamed and unable to understand how his life had reached such a point. Chaplaincy Services provided clothing, toiletries and, at his request, a Bible. Shirley sat with him, listened carefully and allowed him to tell his story.

After a doctor had visited, Duki, with his head bowed, asked Shirley, 'Who do you see when you look at me?' Her response was simple but deeply significant: 'I see a person who is a beloved child of God'. Duki lifted his head and they prayed together. By the following day, his nurse reported that his mood had improved and that he was eating and becoming stronger. His recovery was supported by skilled medical care, generous donations and the spiritual encouragement offered through chaplaincy. The story reminds us that people need both practical assistance and the assurance that they retain their dignity and worth before God.

Shirley went on to say how the word hospitality shares its origin with the word hospital. Biblical hospitality is more than entertaining friends; it is the welcome, care and protection offered to guests and strangers. St Benedict taught that every guest should be received as Christ, because a stranger at the door may be God in disguise. This understanding of hospitality leads naturally to Matthew 14 and Jesus feeding the five thousand, along with many women and children.

Jesus had just heard that his cousin, John the Baptist, had been brutally killed. Overcome with grief, he withdrew by boat to a deserted place, hoping to be alone. Yet the crowds followed him. Although Jesus was mourning, he did not turn them away. He responded with compassion, healed the sick and spent time among the people. His own sorrow did not prevent him from recognising and meeting the needs of others.

As evening approached, the disciples wanted Jesus to send the people away to buy food. Instead, Jesus told them, 'You give them something to eat.' They saw only five loaves and two small fish and believed their resources were inadequate. Jesus blessed what was available and gave it to the disciples to distribute. Everyone ate and was satisfied, and there was food left over. What appeared far too little became an abundance in the hands of God.

This miracle challenges us to consider our own response when we pray for people who are suffering, disadvantaged or in need. We may sometimes be part of God's answer. Even while carrying grief and difficulties of our own, we can offer compassion, hospitality, prayer and practical help. Like the disciples, we may feel that we have too little to give. Yet when we place what we have in God's hands and respond faithfully, God can use it to bring comfort, hope and abundance to others.