

A Reflection for Sunday 2nd August

Introduction

The gospel reading for this Sunday is the story of the feeding of the 5,000 according to Matthew. This version misses out the detail that John's gospel gives about the little boy who has the five loaves of bread and two fish but still it captures the sense of Jesus doing a lot with a little.

Bible reading: Matthew 14: 13 -21



When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴ When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

¹⁵ As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food."

¹⁶ Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."

¹⁷ "We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered.

¹⁸ "Bring them here to me," he said. ¹⁹ And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. ²⁰ They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. ²¹ The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

A prayer

You gathered the crowd on the grass, Lord Jesus,
and they waited expectantly and hopefully
for your words and your teaching.

So we gather as your people now,
and give thanks for the ministry of your word today.

We give thanks for one another, even though we cannot gather together easily,
for those who in your name have fed us,
been kind to us, encouraged us.

As we have been given, so may we give,
for the building up of your Church,
the feeding of the hungry and
to the glory of your name.

Amen.

I love the sense of confidence that this account shows Jesus has in his disciples. They are miles from anywhere and surrounded by a big, needy, crowd of people. The disciples are maybe anxious that the crowd will get angry because they are so hungry. They want Jesus to sort things out before they become problematical. But Jesus, says "no" to sending the crowds away. Instead, he directs his friends to give the people something to eat.

It does seem like a tall order. I would have panicked, I think, as they seem to do. They have got something with five loaves of bread and two fish, but it seems so little among so many. I wonder are they "glass half-full" people. Pessimists? Or maybe realists?

That's the thing though with Jesus. He can do a lot from a little.

He takes the little there is on offer and he feeds a great multitude. In John's gospel we are told that the purpose of this was so that people would see more of the nature of Jesus. John 6:14 states 'After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.'

What does this passage have to tell us today about the nature of Jesus? Well taken as a whole it shows Jesus' great compassion for people. He met them at their point of need. He healed the sick and he fed the hungry. He also tested and stretched those who were in training for leadership! "You sort it" he said.

And it all worked out just fine. "They all ate and were satisfied" and there was even a huge amount of leftovers! An abundance. Jesus doesn't just feed, he feeds abundantly.

In these difficult days of living under the constraints still upon us because of the COVID-19 virus perhaps that is something important to remember. With Jesus we will be satisfied and there will, in time be more than enough. This may give us hope when we think of trying to meet everyone's spiritual needs. At the moment with the government guidelines on spacing out the chairs in church buildings and no singing, or staying for conversation, we might be wondering how we will get what we need. Perhaps like the disciples we need to trust that when we offer what we have Jesus can bless us and there will be a lot from a little. More than enough in fact! It is hard to trust but it is better than fretting.

When it comes to people who are literally hungry now because of poverty and unemployment then this passage can spur us on to contribute to food banks. And to offer what we can by way of encouragement to our government to feed the hungry in our time and place.

The photograph at the top of this reflection is of a communion set which has a mosaic style pattern of the bread and fish. This ancient style of art is a reminder that this story has been portrayed in different times and places and in a variety of ways. Followers of Jesus have long held on to this story through hard times. The fact that the bread and fish adorn a plate and chalice remind us that Jesus shared many meals in different settings. At communion we remember the last supper in particular.

Most of us haven't been able to share holy communion for many months now. I am finding that increasingly hard and I miss the sense of connection with God and with God's people. So as I read Matthew's version of the feeding of the 5000 I am remembering the many times when Jesus has been present with gatherings of disciples and seekers. I am thinking of the many members of this circuit and others with whom I have shared bread and wine (and sometimes fish) in the past. And I am looking forward to a time in the future when we will be able to be part of a great multitude with a real sense of Jesus in the midst.

For the moment though I am challenged to wonder what little I have, with which, Jesus can still do a lot!

Prayer

The breaking of bread and the sharing of wine,
such wealth comes from you, O God.

The feeding of the hungry and the quenching of thirst,
such grace comes from you, O God.

The baptism of water and the blessing of life,
such hope comes from you, O God.

The silence of beauty and the creation's morning song,
such wonders come from you, O God.

The Samaritan's hand and the word of compassion,
such action comes from you, O God.

The cross and the garden, the resurrection and the life,
such treasure comes from you, O God.

May we discover how generously love has filled our world
and hear your call to share that generosity wildly.

All creation and our place within it,
such love comes from you, O God.

Amen.



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Reflection by Rev Dr Roberta Topham & photograph of a holy communion set from Christchurch, Ilkley