

## Sermon for 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2020: Matthew 14:13-21 – Feeding of the five thousand – Trinity 8

Each time we re-read the stories that Jesus told we are in a different place and time – our thinking and sense of relevance and clarity has been shaped by our life experiences since the last time we read them and we see how different aspects of the themes relate to where we are physically, spiritually and emotionally in this day right now as we read and ponder.

Today's miracle story is no different – what we might have focussed on in past days – the relevance of the feeding of the people in relation to how we are spiritually nourished and fed through the coming together to share in Communion each week for example – might now give way for a new perspective – our communal life in the light of a pandemic and lockdown for example....

Food received a lot of attention in one way or another, hasn't it – people have had time to bake and cook and experiment with recipes from books that might have been gathering dust on the shelves in the busyness of life before – there is no denying that food can be comforting and uniting and a really loving way to gather in the sharing of it, lovingly prepared and gratefully received with thanksgiving.

But on the other side, we also experienced a shortage – of basic essentials, essentials we took for granted – and not only that – for our relatively convenient lifestyles – we couldn't even get to the shops to buy it – or get slots to have it delivered, could we? And of course, there was the light-hearted take on the 'lockdown-stone' – the weight we might have put on because of lack of exercise and activity and of course, because of the new-found love for baking – and eating of the said-goodies..

And on the other side of things – people who suffered economic hardship through the whole thing struggled to find ways and means to feed families and be fed themselves – food poverty coming to light in a big way – and perhaps in the mess, a blessed opportunity to highlight this plight that goes on even without a lockdown.

And coming back to the Gospel – the people who witnessed Jesus turning loaves and fishes into an abundant agape meal – a meal of love within a community – would have been living through very similar struggles – different scenery but similar experiences...

It would have been a daunting moment for the disciples as Jesus urged them to feed the crowd – overwhelmingly huge – too huge a task – a reaction some of us might have when faced with the plight of the food-poor of our own community, nation – and even more-so in a global sense.

But we are shown what happens when, despite our seemingly helplessness when faced with the bigger picture – we bring what we can – foodbank offerings – keeping an eye on a neighbour - charity giving – prayers – energy to get involved in volunteering to help in some way – love – before the Lord and how Jesus will take our little offerings given with big love – and blesses them with a heavenward glance to God knowing that whatever is brought lovingly to God is blessed and used to the highest good in the most abundant way...

This miraculous feeding is an important story – it is in all of the Gospel writer's accounts – some varying details – but nevertheless the story is the same, as well as further accounts of more miraculous feedings in Matthew and Mark's Gospels. And the focus isn't actually about the numbers – 5000 here today (see Matthew 14:13-21, Mark 6:32-44, Luke 9:12-17 and John 6:1-14) – because actually, this story is about the men who are gathered and taking into account women and children, the number could have been much higher...

And so today – rather than focus on the practical detail, we can ask ourselves 'what would we want Jesus to be saying to us now – how would we want him to be with us – what WOULD Jesus be saying to us now – how WOULD he be with us?

I don't know about you, but the Jesus I love and who I believe loves me would be holding me with compassion and that firm gentleness that he has – tough love with the arms of kindness and understanding holding me up – carrying me through.

And I don't know about you, but the faith I have in that kindness and compassion of Jesus that lives out the eternal and everlasting love of the Heavenly Father we are all children of – tells me – even when I don't

want to hear it – that God is right with us – in the light and in the dark – in the beginning of the story and in the end – and if that is so – then sometimes all we can do is cling on for dear life – don't ask too many questions – but trust, let go – and go with it, trusting that sooner or later we will be nourished with the bread of life – and the water that will quench an unquenchable thirst for truth and understanding and meaning and peace....

So – the loaves and fishes of abundant life – we know that Jesus is sitting alongside the ordinary people of the day – lamenting over the death of John the Baptist his cousin – and despite the sadness, Jesus still offered compassion and love to ordinary people with ordinary worries of the day – and blessed, fed and nourished them with not only bread in a physical sense, but in a spiritual sense that would uphold them even when the food was eaten – the bread of life indeed...

People came together from their different stories and received sharing and caring of the Lord and learnt what it meant to receive that attention in the understanding that they too would 'go and do likewise' in the days of their own lives...

There is more than feeding going on – there is the mobilising of community life – disciples being called to reflect and act in the best way for their community – Jesus blessing the acts as they are lifted to God in his name – and trusting that needs will be met – with twelve baskets over – no keeping to oneself of leftovers – but the sharing and caring that comes with community comes into place as leftovers are gathered and shared with solidarity, justice and love – we are in this together and what's more God is in it with us through Jesus.

This is a marvellous story of the abundant grace of God and the compassionate love of Jesus – for us all....  
"And all ate and were filled" (Matthew 14.20). Thanks be to God....

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