

Sunday 2nd August 2020
A Sermon by the Rev James W. Aitchison
Based on a Reading from the Lectionary

Opening Prayers

God meets us in our greatest need
and satisfies us with divine presence and provision.
In gratitude, let us worship the Lord our God.

Loving God, you have given us life and transformed us, you have given us a heart to reach out to all who hunger for what only you can give. Keep our feet in your paths and bless us so that we may bless others, through Jesus Christ our Redeemer and Lord. **Amen.**

A Reading from Holy Scripture:

Matthew 14:13-21 Jesus feeds the five thousand.

¹³ 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.

New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

Sermon

Because of the fishing trade the lake of Galilee was surrounded by many towns and villages so the population of this region was considerable. In today's Gospel reading the story takes us to the shores of this great lake.

Jesus had been teaching the people but when He heard that his relative John the Baptist had been beheaded, He got into a boat and withdrew privately to find solitary place further along the shore of the lake. We can only assume that Jesus was saddened by the death of John and wanted time to reflect and pray.

But yet again we see His peace disturbed, as the people, so intent on finding Him, walk around the shore, gather together as a crowd and are there to greet Him before He even lands the boat.

Rather being annoyed at their intrusion, Jesus looks at the large crowd of people and has compassion for them. Now there's a lesson for us all: when we want time to ourselves, what is our reaction when someone in need comes to our attention? Both energy and compassion are required, yet energy alone cannot give us compassion, but amazingly, compassion can often give us the energy to do that which we thought we were too tired to do.

Jesus began healing the sick and He must have continued doing this for some time, because the next sentence Matthew writes is, 'As evening approached.'

Jesus was probably very tired, yet there is no hint that He was irritated with the people, on the contrary He is very patient. From what Matthew writes it seems that Jesus would have continued healing those who were sick had not the Disciples interrupted Him by asking that He send the people into town to get food for themselves.

Much to the surprise of the Disciples, Jesus says that the people do not need to go into town for food, and tells the Disciples to feed them.

Now what do you think the Disciples made of this?

"What did He say?"

"Is He serious?"

"There are over five thousand people here, how can we feed them?"

"Even if we could afford it, we are far from town, so where would we get the food?"

They tell Jesus that they have only five loaves of bread and two fish.

They could well have thought to themselves, "This is our dinner, and it is barely enough for us. How are these meagre supplies going to feed all these people?"

Lots of questions, but would we have been any different? In fact are any different now? When God requires something of us and we think it too hard a task, or we cannot make sense of how it might be accomplished, are we not inclined to immediately assume that it is impossible?

Jesus tells the Disciples to bring what they have to Him, and as meagre, as little, as weak as it may be He will take what is offered and make something of it.

So when we convince ourselves that something is impossible, if we, like the Disciples, trust in Jesus and say, "here you are Lord, over to you." Then we will be amazed at what God can do.

The disciples knew that this was a problem that they could not solve, so they obey Jesus and hand over what they have to Him, unsure of what He will do, but they trust that He will take control of the situation and deal with one way or another.

Jesus was not taken by surprise by the situation: have you read anything in the whole of the Scriptures that state or imply that Jesus was ever taken off guard? Jesus was always in command of the situation and always in control of His emotions. (As a man He had the full range of Human emotions).

When in His righteous anger when He overturned the tables of the moneychangers in the Temple, HE had complete control of His anger.

Even when He was hanging on the Cross He refused the wine vinegar offered on a sponge, lest it dull His will and senses. Even in His agony, He was in control of Himself and the Situation.

Having told the crowds to sit down, Jesus takes the five and two fish. Looks up to heaven and blesses them, and then gives what is before Him to the Disciples to distribute to the people. And all eat, not just a crumb of bread and flake of fish, but enough to fill them, and what is more there was food to spare.

Blessings in abundance!

What has just happened? Was this indeed a miracle?

Many people see no miracle here, for the it is simple case of sharing; because Jesus was willing to share His food with others they followed His example took out their packed lunches and shared them around.

This is hardly the impression given by the four Gospel writers. Jesus had been healing the sick all day, and the impression given by the Gospels is that these in themselves were miracles, why should this be the only none miracle in a day of miracles.

The way the Gospel writers describe this event, or rather the way they do not describe it, indicates that something indescribable had happened. Surely if this was as simple sharing of food, then this would have been described, but how Jesus divided five loaves and two fish could not be described.

If it is too much for some people to acknowledge this a miracle, how will they fare with the Virgin conception and birth?

That Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man?

That Jesus healed those who could not be healed by any other?

That He raised the dead?

After He had died and was buried He rose to life?

If people have a problem with Miracles, then they will have a problem with the whole of the Christian message, for it is founded upon the most amazing Miracle of all, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

What are a few loaves and fish in comparison to this?

Why accept some miracles and not others?

What attracted the crowds to Jesus? It is unlikely that it was the thought that they might get free lunch or dinner. They knew they were far from shops and, they had no idea of what Jesus would do or could do. He had not given them food before so why should they expect it now?

Did they come for food? No!

The people came and gathered around Jesus for spiritual nourishment, they were eager to hear what He had to tell them about God and the Kingdom of God. They wanted to know how to cope with the exigencies and tribulations in life, seeking to understand what God had done for them and expected of them.

The people came to Jesus not for any loaves that He might have had, but for His love. Love not loaves was the important thing that Jesus offered to the crowds that day and it is what He offers to everyone.

Because we can read through the Scriptures and see the Gospel story unfold, it is possible to see this miracle of the feeding of the five thousand as an emblem, a sign, of that day when He who referred to Himself as 'The Bread of Life,' would have His body broken as a sacrifice for all and for all time.

The 17th Century Puritan writer Mathew Henry writes concerning this miracle,

'The provisions of Christ's Gospel, appear mean and scanty to the world, yet they satisfy all that feed on Him in their hearts by faith and with thanksgiving.'

Like the Disciples, trust that Jesus is in control, bring what you have to Him, no matter how meagre and He will take these and do wonders with them and with you. And remember that some may come to Jesus for loaves, they will be disappointed, but those who come to Him for love, will have their hearts filled to overflowing and with basketfuls to spare.

Amen!

Prayers Of Intercession

Let us pray for the needs of the world, saying,

O Lord, attend to our cry, give ear to our prayer.

God who hears us, holds us, and helps us,
you are our eternal source of blessing.

You are our endless source of provision.

In your compassion, you see our need;
you heal our sickness and satisfy our hunger.

Hear us now as we pray for the church, the world,
and all in need:

O Lord, attend to our cry, give ear to our prayer.

For our sisters and brothers called by your name
throughout the world,

O Lord, attend to our cry, give ear to our prayer.

Bless your church and help us move forward
in mission with you.

O Lord, attend to our cry, give ear to our prayer.

For the healing and preservation of your creation
in heaven and on earth,

O Lord, attend to our cry, give ear to our prayer.

For the need of the nations—
wisdom for leaders, vindication and relief for the oppressed—

O Lord, attend to our cry, give ear to our prayer.

For those who are hungry, ill, vulnerable,
or seeking refuge from adversaries and injustice,

O Lord, attend to our cry, give ear to our prayer.

For all who need you, near and far,
especially those we name now, aloud and in our hearts . . .
[Names those on your mind and hearts.]

O Lord, attend to our cry, give ear to our prayer.

Be pleased to show us your steadfast love,
that we may have a glimpse of your glory
and be filled with the peace that the knowledge of your
presence brings, through Christ our Lord we pray. **Amen.**

Commemoration of the Faithful Departed

And now, Father, bring to our remembrance the unity of the church in heaven and on earth, fill us with the joy of the faithful departed, and keep us faithful to you all the days of our service here on earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, Who taught us to pray, when He said, 'Our Father...'

The Lord's Prayer

OUR Father which art in heaven,
Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:
For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,
For ever. Amen.

The Blessing

The Blessing of God Almighty, The Father, The Son and the Holy Spirit be upon you. Amen!