

## **Feeding the Five Thousand: a sermon on Matthew 14: 13-21 by Rev Lin Vawer, 02/08/2020**

The gospel reading today, the Feeding of the 5000 is such a familiar story. I am sure that many of us heard it at Sunday school and have heard many sermons preached about it since. For both adults and children I think there is still a certain “Wow” moment that says, “This is some Jesus who can feed so many with so little, who can make the impossible happen”. Each time it has the power to inspire.

The reading begins with “when Jesus heard this”. At the end of a long day with large and desperate crowds, Jesus and the disciples heard of the brutal death of John the Baptist. Understandably, they wanted to get away. They were grief stricken. Sometimes we need to be alone in our grief before we can face the world and it seems Jesus is no different. However, the crowds follow and though the disciples want to send them away Jesus has compassion on them invites them to stay and eat. With just 5 loaves and 2 fish to be found Jesus tells the disciples to feed the masses. Imagine the look on their faces. The meagre offering is blessed and before you know it, everyone’s hunger is satisfied with 12 baskets of leftovers. As they often were, the disciples were in for a surprise that evening as they witness the miraculous power of God’s love and provision.

In a nutshell. That’s it. A lovely story. However, is that all it is? It is the only miracle found in all four gospels, which suggests that it held great importance for the early church, so what importance can it have for us, today? This is a story of great power because it demonstrates that God is love, it teaches us what it means to follow Christ and it assures us of Gods power for good in the world.

**This story teaches us that God is love.** The reality is that Jesus “had compassion”. In spite of incredible pressure and overwhelming grief, compassion for people is what motivates him. And it is not an abstract compassion; it is compassion that cares about the most basic of needs – physical hunger. God who has the ultimate power intends peace for the world, spiritual wholeness and an end to hunger. Our reading from Isaiah points to Good News for the poor and a wakeup call to the rest, to put down the gadgets that distract us from Gods project, of life in abundance for all. It calls us to evaluate how we spend our energy. Are we caught up by the energy of want and information overload that still leaves us feeling empty inside or are we prepared to spend our money and energy on the life project that God calls us to join? Isaiah reminds us that God calls us to a banquet where there is no A or B list, no red carpet, just an invitation to show up and eat with others. Whoever they are, whatever their social status.

**I know that I have been challenged** by this. As part of training, I found myself on a placement at the Good shepherd ministry. I say found myself because it was not where I wanted to be. Where I wanted to be and where God wanted me to be were poles apart and to say I was not happy with God puts it mildly. What happened..... within days I was taught so much about service, compassion and the love of God in real life that I was humbled beyond belief. It is fair to say that the women there scared the life out of me more than the men, but it became my privilege to serve them in such small ways. Making the tea, serving a meal, remembering a name – little things to us meant a huge amount to the people there. Each person in their own way taught me that there is no A or B list, just an invitation to show up and eat with others. There I was, part of the life project God calls us to join.

**This story teaches us about being disciples**, about the awesome responsibility that God has entrusted to us. It is not Jesus who feeds the crowd. He told the disciples to do it. The disciples are indispensable – they recognise the need, they act on Jesus orders (preposterous though they seemed) and they gather the leftovers. They symbolise what it means to compliment the compassionate ministry of Jesus and they find compassion that goes beyond their wildest imagination. The resources are poor but in Jesus hands they are more than sufficient. Jesus did not work alone. God does not work alone. He works through people; he works through you and me. He has entrusted us to be the body of Christ – the hands and feet through which his work is done in the world. To follow Jesus is to express our faith in concrete acts of love, justice and compassion towards others. It is no accident that Matthew tells us that we will meet Jesus in reaching out to the “least” of our brothers and sisters – the hungry, the thirsty, the imprisoned. We are indispensable disciples.

**This story teaches us** that when we need it most, God will give us the power to work for good in our community and in our wider world. It’s a reality that most of us have discovered when we’ve been faced with situations we have thought we can’t manage. When Jesus told the disciples to feed the five thousand they thought, it was impossible. The needs were so great, the resources so few. Haven’t there been times when we have felt the same? However, look at the disciples – when they worked together and followed Jesus, they had more than enough.

I often think that I did not have a call to ministry until around my second term at college, other people had it for me and God just kept affirming it. I had so many excuses – I didn’t have time, I wasn’t clever enough, and my trump card, I was too old. The director of ordinands told me that Churchill became prime minister for the first time when he was 66. That really wasn’t what I wanted to hear! Every obstacle I put in the way, God broke down and he kept his promise to give me the words, the resources and the strength to keep going, even when it was tough.

When we follow Jesus intentionally, we are promised more than enough.

This is also a story full of promise.

It is a promise that when we join in unity and faithfulness – God will be with us.

It is a promise that even in our struggles, God will be with us and that his intention of love, peace and justice will be fulfilled.

It is a promise that through the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us; as faithful disciples, God will be with us as we join with him in making fullness of life become a reality today for the world that he loves.

God promises that he will be with us.

And we know that God always keeps his promises.

**Amen**

Lord as we look with the compassion of your eyes on the world inspire us to be willing and indispensable disciples. Inspire us to take risks as we use our energy and resources to grow your kingdom and bless the little we give abundantly, just as the loaves and fish were blessed. God with us, we claim your promises today as we look with hope and eager longing to life in all its fullness for all of creation. Amen