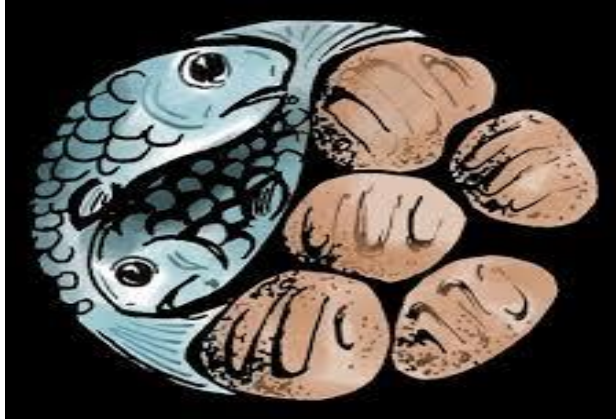


Sunday Morning Worship
Readings and Prayers 28th July



2 Kings 4.42-44

A man came from Baal-shalishah, bringing food from the first fruits to the man of God: twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. Elisha said, 'Give it to the people and let them eat.' But his servant said, 'How can I set this before a hundred people?' So he repeated, 'Give it to the people and let them eat, for thus says the Lord, "They shall eat and have some left."' He set it before them, they ate, and had some left, according to the word of the Lord.

This is the word of the Lord.

Ephesians 3.14-21

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever.
Amen.

This is the word of the Lord.

John 6.1-21

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming towards him, Jesus said to Philip, 'Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?' He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, 'Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.' One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, 'There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?' Jesus said, 'Make the people sit down.' Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all.

Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, 'Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.' So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, 'This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.'

When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, got into a boat, and started across the lake to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The lake became rough because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the lake and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. But he said to them, 'It is I; do not be afraid.' Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land towards which they were going.

Reflection by Ann Waizeneker

Picture yourself by the Sea of Galilee. You are among a large crowd following the man called Jesus because he is healing the sick, miraculously. You have lost track of time, you are by now a long way from home, you have no food and no means to buy any. You feel tired and hungry. Through the crowds, you can just make out a discussion going on between this Jesus and his close disciples. You see them take some bread and fish offered by a young boy. Generous of the boy but that's not going to feed everyone. And yet, somehow it does. And not only that, there are twelve basketfuls of leftovers! I wonder how you would have felt, what you would have made of all this?

I remember the priest and theologian, Jeffrey John, talking about this years ago, recounting how his two RE teachers at school took very different views of this miracle. For one teacher, it was a demonstration of Jesus' divine power in providing enough food. As simple as that, proving Jesus can do anything. The other teacher had a different interpretation, suggesting that in the feeding of the 5000, Jesus and his disciples shared their lunch and it inspired others to do the same, so there was enough for everyone. An ethical lesson about sharing, generosity.

Both these approaches have some truth in them, but both are unsatisfactory on their own; to think of them, or indeed, any of Jesus' miracles in this rather narrow way, is to miss the opportunity to deepen our understanding, our faith and our relationship with Jesus.

If you had been there, perhaps you would have remembered the story of the prophet Elisha you learnt in the synagogue. Elisha orders his servant to feed one hundred men with food brought by a stranger who has travelled to fulfil the law to bring the first fruits of the harvest to the man of God. The servant questions how so little will feed so many, but there is plenty to go round with some left over. There is always abundance with God.

Or perhaps it would have struck you as more than coincidence that it is Passover – that time each year when Jews remember God liberating the

children of Israel from Egypt and leading them through the wilderness to the promised land. You may have recalled that God fed them in the wilderness with manna, bread from heaven. So, this feeding with bread and fish makes an immediate connection with Passover, with a God who feeds and liberates his people. Not just satisfying physical hunger but providing everything we need in life. In other words, it's our message of salvation, reflected in the eucharist, in the breaking and sharing of bread. It is a sign of the constant generosity and love of God which is reinforced for us when we share the meal of communion together with others all round the world each week. The 5000 has grown into many millions (there are an estimated 2.5 billion Christians) all fed at God's table.

That's quite a thought!

That connection with Passover would not have been lost on this mainly Jewish crowd. It was their history, and it is hardly surprising therefore that,

- having witnessed Jesus' healing miracles and now this feeding miracle
- and having seen that 12 baskets of food were left over which must surely represent the 12 tribes of Israel

they quickly make the jump from regarding Jesus as a prophet to seeing him as "the one", the Messiah, the king who will vanquish their enemies. You can just imagine their excitement, can't you?

And it is against this background that Jesus withdraws. We are told: When Jesus realised that they were about to come and take him by force to make him a king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself. John 6.15

So, why did Jesus withdraw at this point? The crowd love him, why go? Perhaps because they have misunderstood why he has come. They are looking for a king who will do what they want him to do, a king shaped by human self-interest, who will drive out the Romans. In other words, a king who will save them from others, not from themselves. A natural human tendency - to place our own wishes, our own desires first. How often do we ask God for what we want, not for what he wants for us?

And how often do we put our expectations on other people and then feel disillusioned or disappointed when those expectations are not met? We do it to our nation's leaders and probably much closer to home, to those we love. Does this include God?

It has been suggested that Jesus may have withdrawn for more than a simple desire to disabuse the crowd of their wrong thinking. If we think back to the accounts of Jesus in the wilderness, we know that he was sorely tempted by the lure of worldly power, popularity and fame. Perhaps this withdrawal was in part to enable Jesus to resist these temptations.

He withdraws to spend time with God, and in this act, we are reminded of where the source of our strength comes from. Paul talks about this in his letter to the Ephesians, highlighting the importance of prayer. Not as a means to get all our wishes answered. Rather, as a way of attuning our hearts and minds to God, so that we can say: "Lord, you know what I yearn for, but your will be done."

Today across the world there will be triumph and tragedy, joy and pain, birth and bereavement. Prayer won't change these realities, but it may change how we face them, so that we can pray with confidence:

Lord Jesus Christ, I go in your strength, knowing that whatever I may face you will be sufficient for all my needs. In you I put my trust, now and for always. Amen

Prayers

Lord, throughout our lives we hunger and thirst for you,
we long for you, we look for you'
hear us now as we offer our prayers to you.

To the bidding: Lord in your mercy
Please respond: **Hear our prayer**

Lord in your mercy
Hear our prayer.

Lord, in all of life you provide for us,
you feed us, you support us, you love us,
you fill us with the glory of your presence;
Lord, as we have greatly received, may we share with others.
May we share the good news and share our prosperity.
We pray for relief organisations, especially for the work of United
Nations and for Médecins San Frontier.
Silence

Lord in your mercy
Hear our prayer.

Creator God, bless all who provide us with our needs:
we pray for the farmers and the fishermen of our world,
especially in areas where crops have failed,
for all who have suffered through storms and disasters.
We remember all who transport food and
all who sell it in shops.
Silence

Lord in your mercy
Hear our prayer.

Lord, we pray for all who are without resources,
homes where there is hunger and poverty,
places where people suffer from malnutrition;
for all who are greatly in debt,
and for those who have had homes or possessions repossessed.

Silence

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer.

We pray for all who are storm-tossed at this time,
for all who are struggling to survive.

We pray for friends and loved ones who are ill,
for all who can no longer cope alone,
for the fearful and the anxious.

From our own community we pray especially for:

Leon and Valda Bailey, Joyce Pringle, June Hume, Ann Hunt, Anuwat Wanggane, Joan Tyson, Alan Coe, Jack Tubby, Rob & Lucy, Roger Jones, Patricia Ash, Jason Thomson, Ryan Day, Brenda Hulland, David New, and Adrina and Alan Price.

And in the silence of our own hearts, we lift before you now, those we know to be in need at this time.

Silence

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer.

We remember all who have gone beyond the storms of life and are now at peace in your eternal presence remembering those who have recently died:

And we pray for all who mourn.

We remember with love and gratitude those whose anniversary of death falls at this time: Joy Cox, David Cooper, June Fisher, Megan Rowe, Jim Adams, George Lawrence, Rowland Humphries and Keith Mason.

Grant us with them a share in your eternal kingdom.
May they rest in peace and rise in glory.

Silence

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer.

Lord , we give you our lives
as well as our words of praise,
so that each moment from now on
becomes an offering of love.

Merciful Father,

accept these prayers

for the sake of your Son,

our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen.