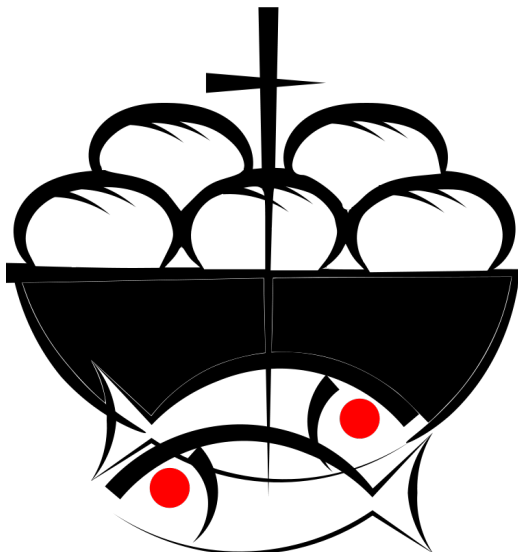


## Trinity 9

### Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2020



#### Readings:

Genesis 32:22-31

The same night he [Jacob] got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had. Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, 'Let me go, for the day is breaking.' But Jacob said, 'I will not let you go, unless you bless me.' So he said to him, 'What is your name?' And he said, 'Jacob.' Then the man said, 'You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed.' Then Jacob asked him, 'Please tell me your name.' But he said, 'Why is it that you ask my name?' And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, 'For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved.' The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip.

Matthew 14:13-21

Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, 'This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.' Jesus said to them, 'They need not go away; you give them something to eat.' They replied, 'We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.' And he said, 'Bring them here to me.' Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

## **Reflection**

We have finished our Sermon series on the five events which shaped Christianity and have reverted to the set year A lectionary readings. But as we progress through Matthew, we are now seeing other momentous events – miracles. The miracles are amazing in themselves but they are also deeply symbolic as signs of the coming kingdom, the kingdom that unfolds day by day as Jesus reveals more and more of God’s love and of his plan for humanity. This week and next we revisit what are probably the two most famous miracles of all, which everyone, churchgoer or not, is certainly familiar with – the feeding of the five thousand and Jesus walking on the water.

The sequence of events which precedes today’s story, we might expect to give Jesus pause for thought and concern for his own safety. Today’s Gospel reading begins very abruptly – “when Jesus heard this” – but you have to look back to the previous verses to find what it was that he heard – and it was the devastating news that Herod has just executed Jesus’ cousin, John the Baptist, in a brutal, arbitrary fashion. It is no wonder, then, that Jesus feels the need to withdraw for a while, to pray and be alone with his thoughts. If he did worry about his safety, it would surely be because of the timing. John was a great loss, but essentially his work was done. Jesus’ was only just beginning so he did need to take some precautions to make sure he remained free – at least until his appointed hour.

But he already had a reputation and there was no way he would be able to keep out of the public gaze. Perhaps, for the moment at least, that was his safest bet. The authorities would think twice about trying to arrest him if he was surrounded by hundreds or – as here – thousands of people.

A huge crowd has gathered to hear Jesus and seek healing for the sick among them. And when Jesus sees them, he puts his own grief to one side, and, as so often, it says he had compassion for them. Whatever his own needs, he could not refrain from helping those who came to him in **their** need. His ministrations must have taken most of the day but the crowd remains, held fast by the magnetism of Jesus’ persona, and, I am guessing, staying to rejoice in having sick family members restored to them.

But they are out in the open, well way from any habitation and the cold night is coming on. How will Jesus react to their plight now? As always, need will be met in the most practical way.

Thinking about these miracles, it occurred to me that it might be helpful to apply the same method that John Pritchard applied to the five events. What happened? What does it mean? What does it mean to us?

### **What happened?**

We have all known this story since Sunday School. At nightfall, Jesus is still faced with this huge crowd of about 5,000. (Luke and John say 5,000 men so perhaps they only considered it worth recording the men and there may have been even more women and children present) Jesus instructs them to sit down on the hillside while he got the disciples to seek out some food. But all they could come up with was a basket of five loaves and two fishes. And yet when this puny amount of food was distributed, everyone there ate enough to be satisfied; and a huge amount was left over. Like all miracles, it defies logic but the evidence is the happy and contented crowd.

### **What does it mean?**

Above all, it tells us that Jesus cares. He came to earth precisely to demonstrate that care which had its ultimate manifestation in the cross. But it did not begin there; we see that same care and compassion exercised throughout his ministry. He could never ignore any

need that he was made aware of, and his constant efforts on behalf of those who petitioned him frequently resulted in exhaustion and spiritual weariness, which is why we so often hear in the Gospels that he needed to get away and spend time in solitary communion with his Father. But as soon as he felt that his batteries were recharged, he returned to resume his work and ministry. No matter what the demands upon him, his compassion could never be exhausted.

#### **What does it mean for us now?**

Now, as then, Christ continues to care. The compassion he showed to that hungry crowd he shows to us. This miracle broadcasts the enduring grace of God's provision. Now, as then, there is enough for everyone, and plenty to spare – if only we can learn that lesson of unselfish sharing! Then we will indeed speed the coming of the kingdom on earth. But the significance goes beyond the physical; sharing the bread like this is also a foreshadowing of the coming Last Supper. This story of physical provision presages the spiritual provision of Jesus as the bread of life. Admittedly it is many weeks since we were able to join together to share the Eucharist which symbolises that spiritual feeding, but spiritual nourishment has continued to be available. For Christ always makes himself accessible to us. He has already shown us that he did not consider any sacrifice too great when it comes to our welfare, no matter what the cost to him. He continues to feed us, to pour himself out into our lives as unstintingly and as generously as ever. Wherever we are, whatever we need, he **will** provide. His compassion will never be exhausted. And we in our turn can show that compassion to others. "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God." (Corinthians 1:3)

Amen

#### **Prayers**

##### **Today's Collect**

Almighty God,  
who sent your Holy Spirit  
to be the life and light of your Church:  
open our hearts to the riches of your grace,  
that we may bring forth the fruit of the Spirit  
in love and joy and peace;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

Amen

##### **A Prayer of thanksgiving for provision and protection**

Lord, thank you for your amazing power and work in our lives, thank you for your goodness and for your blessings over us. Thank you that you are able to bring hope through even the toughest of times, strengthening us for your purposes. Thank you for your great love and care. Thank you for your mercy and grace. Thank you that you are always with us and will never leave us. Thank you for your incredible sacrifice so that we might have freedom and life. Forgive us for when we don't thank you enough, for who you are, for all that you do, for

all that you've given. Help us to set our eyes and our hearts on you afresh. Renew our spirits, fill us with your peace and joy. We love you and we need you, this day and every day. We give you praise and thanks, for You alone are worthy! In Jesus' Name  
Amen

**Blessing**

To God the Father, who loved us,  
And made us accepted in the Beloved:  
To God the Son, who loved us,  
And loosed us from our sins by his own blood:  
To God the Holy Spirit,  
Who spreads the love of God abroad in our hearts:  
To the one true God be all love and all glory  
For time and for eternity.  
And the blessing of God Almighty,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
be among you and remain with you always.  
Amen