

READINGS AND REFLECTION FOR SUNDAY 2 AUGUST 2020
THE 8TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

PSALM 17.1-7

- 1 Hear my just cause, O Lord; consider my complaint; 
listen to my prayer, which comes not from lying lips.
- 2 Let my vindication come forth from your presence; 
let your eyes behold what is right.
- 3 Weigh my heart, examine me by night, 
refine me, and you will find no impurity in me.
- 4 My mouth does not trespass for earthly rewards; 
I have heeded the words of your lips.
- 5 My footsteps hold fast in the ways of your commandments; 
my feet have not stumbled in your paths.
- 6 I call upon you, O God, for you will answer me; 
incline your ear to me, and listen to my words.
- 7 Show me your marvellous loving-kindness, 
O Saviour of those who take refuge at your right hand
from those who rise up against them.

Glory to the Father and to the Son
And to the Holy Spirit;
As it was in the beginning is now
And shall be for ever. Amen.

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Romans 9.1-5

1 I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit— 2 I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. 4 They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; 5 to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

Matthew 14.13-21

13 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. 14 When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. 15 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.” 16 Jesus said to them, “They need not go away; you give them something to eat.” 17 They replied, “We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.” 18 And he said, “Bring them here to me.” 19 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. 20 And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. 21 And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Reflection – this week from Peter

Have you noticed that Jesus seems to like picnics? Perhaps the best example comes at the end of John's Gospel where the disciples have been fishing - unsuccessfully - all night. The risen Jesus appears on the lake shore and invites them to come and have breakfast - and they find him cooking a picnic breakfast by the water. That encounter tells us so much about the way God cares for us: there is a sensitivity, an acute awareness of our needs, and of the circumstances of the moment.

Today's Gospel gives us the familiar story of the feeding of the 5000. This is, of course, another picnic, albeit on a grand scale. We generally like picnics, but they are quite hard work. There is a good deal of planning to be done, and seemingly lots of things to be taken and carried. There's always the anxiety about running out - so we take extra. Jesus' picnic could hardly be more different. There is a realisation that the crowd that has been so eager to follow him and hear him will be hungry. Jesus says, 'OK, what we do have?' Together they can put together a handful of fish and a little bread. The disciples dismiss this immediately - useless for so many. But Jesus just presses on. With minimal fuss he takes what is on offer, blesses it and tells the disciples to feed the people. To their astonishment there is plenty: indeed there are twelve baskets of left overs! The only puzzling thing is that there is no mention of drink. You would surely want something to wash bread and fish down with!

Once again, we see God's care in action. Just what is needed, just when it is needed - but not quite what we expected, and certainly not in the way we expected it. And St Matthew at least seems to use Jesus' fondness for picnics to tell us something else as well. In Matthew's Gospel there are two occasions when Jesus produces a surprise picnic. This one - when he feeds 5000 people, - and another a little later on when he feeds about 4000. What do these two very similar occasions tell us? The community that first received Matthew's Gospel was a Jewish Christian community. There was still much debate about who was to be included in the good news of Jesus. It now looks as though Matthew uses these two occasions when Jesus conjured up a spontaneous picnic to teach us about God's desire that everyone be included in the good news. The first seems to be affirming the place the Jewish community has in God's love: the people of the first covenant. But the second, not quite as numerous, seems to be the demonstration that God wants everyone else to be there as well. Touched by God's care for us all, God's awareness of our true needs, we shall want to respond by giving ourselves to God. Being human, we make even this difficult. While it is proper to want to be prepared; while we wouldn't go to a party in our gardening clothes; while we like to know in advance what a meeting is going to be about: while all these things are true, at some point we have to get up and go. And God asks only that we give ourselves, as we are. In response, God gives us God's own self, life and grace and truth.