



**COLLECT, READINGS AND REFLECTION**  
**SUNDAY 25 JULY 2021 – 8<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity**

**COLLECT**

Lord God,  
your Son left the riches of heaven  
and became poor for our sake:  
when we prosper save us from pride,  
when we are needy save us from despair,  
that we may trust in you alone;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Psalm 145: 10-19**

- 10 All your works praise you, O Lord, ♦  
and your faithful servants bless you.
- 11 They tell of the glory of your kingdom ♦  
and speak of your mighty power,
- 12 To make known to all peoples your mighty acts ♦  
and the glorious splendour of your kingdom.
- 13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom; ♦  
your dominion endures throughout all ages.
- 14 The Lord is sure in all his words ♦  
and faithful in all his deeds.
- 15 The Lord upholds all those who fall ♦  
and lifts up all those who are bowed down.
- 16 The eyes of all wait upon you, O Lord, ♦  
and you give them their food in due season.
- 17 You open wide your hand ♦  
and fill all things living with plenty.
- 18 The Lord is righteous in all his ways ♦  
and loving in all his works.
- 19 The Lord is near to those who call upon him, ♦  
to all who call upon him faithfully.

## **Ephesians 3: 14-21**

### Prayer for the Readers

<sup>14</sup> For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>15</sup> from whom every family<sup>[b]</sup> in heaven and on earth takes its name. <sup>16</sup> 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, <sup>17</sup> and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. <sup>18</sup> I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup> and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

<sup>20</sup> 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, <sup>21</sup> to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

## **John 6: 1-21**

### Feeding the Five Thousand

**6** After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias.<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>2</sup> A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. <sup>3</sup> Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. <sup>4</sup> Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. <sup>5</sup> 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?' <sup>6</sup> He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. <sup>7</sup> Philip answered him, 'Six months' wages<sup>[b]</sup> would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.' <sup>8</sup> One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, <sup>9</sup> 'There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?' <sup>10</sup> Jesus said, 'Make the people sit down.' Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they<sup>[c]</sup> sat down, about five thousand in all. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, 'Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.' <sup>13</sup> So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. <sup>14</sup> 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.'

<sup>15</sup> When Jesus realised that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

### Jesus Walks on the Water

<sup>16</sup> When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, <sup>17</sup> got into a boat, and started across the lake to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. <sup>18</sup> The lake became rough because a strong wind was blowing. <sup>19</sup> When they had rowed about three or four miles, <sup>[d]</sup> they saw Jesus walking on the lake and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. <sup>20</sup> But he said to them, 'It is I; <sup>[e]</sup> do not be afraid.' <sup>21</sup> Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land towards which they were going.

### ***A Reflection from Hannah...***

We know the story of the feeding of the 5,000 so well! It's in all four Gospels, and is probably one of the few stories of Jesus that almost anyone can recount. The idea of 'walking on water' is likewise deep in our culture- it's become an idiom to describe anyone we might suspect of having a Messiah Complex! So again, that story of Christ defying the laws of nature and miraculously striding along the meniscus of a wild sea is one we know well- so well- that we may feel there is little chance that in revisiting it we will learn anything new.

In John's version, these two stories are next to each other, and are linked by a seldom-noticed and rather odd verse. After the 5,000 have had their fill and are coming to terms with the reality before their eyes, we read this:

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

Take him by force and make him king? Why? Well they had just sat passively and, miraculously, were given their fill of food. If this person is able to supply their every need, just like that, then it's understandable that the 5,000 don't want to let him go. They want to harness him and use him for their own ends. You can imagine the chatter- 'We'd never have to work again! We can live like royalty and have all we want, when we want it!'

And of course, the people already thought the promised Messiah would deliver them very literally from all their woes. Jesus *is* the answer, but he is *not* that kind of king. He

saw the way the crowds were thinking and left, so that they would not be tempted into taking the situation into their own hands- which would only serve to compromise the Gospel.

Christ came to show us our true humanity, and it is not what the crowds assumed that day. It is interdependent and participatory; with the life of God, with each other and with creation. If we just sit and wait for picnic after picnic to appear, into eternity, then something in our humanity is diminished. Instead (and here's the shock of it), we are invited to participate in the dynamic life of God, which is much richer, much more mysterious and certainly not passive.

There is so much to celebrate, so much beauty and jubilee in the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000, but it is not a wholesale metaphor for life in God's company- that assumption leads to a mistaken understanding of both Christ and our God-given identity. Our true king invites us into relationship, calls us his siblings and, as the story of Jesus walking on the water show us, is wild and free. We glimpse something of that glory in the more nuanced and mysterious image of the disciples cowering on the agitated sea, terror-struck as a shadowy figure approaches them saying 'do not be afraid'. The juxtaposition of these two stories in John's Gospel reminds us that we cannot harness God's power for our own ends (even if we'd quite like to), and the pilgrimage all are invited to join is just that- it's more than a long sit on a rug whilst we're fed, it's a journey that will have ups and downs, but the promise of Christ's abiding company, telling us not to be afraid.