



Abington Pastoral Letter No.24 05.08.2020

Dear Friends

Live Streaming from the church building and Face coverings

Last Sunday, the Eucharist was celebrated inside the lady chapel which was broadcasted through Facebook and Youtube. It was the first time in 5 months a service was offered inside the church building. I was joined by my own family and the Aier's family who helped me with operating the broadcast software. It was a success and we now know that broadcasting services from the church building is possible.

I am planning to celebrate the Eucharist at the lady chapel on this coming Sunday as we did last Sunday. This time I will invite Prester to preach for us from the lady chapel. This very gentle and incremental way of offering worship inside the church building will help us to be more prepared for the day when we are able to gather together in the building. It will also help us to identify things that needs to be solved or addressed as we prepare to live stream the service while offering the worship with the congregation physically present in the building.

Of course, keeping everyone's safety and keeping the social distancing will be our top priority as we carefully go ahead with this. This coming Sunday, you will see me appearing with my face covering on. I won't be able to take it off except the moment when I receive the communion. This will apply to all those who will be present in the building. The preacher will also have to put the face covering on while s/he is preaching. This is to comply with the rules set by the government and the national church. Our Bishop has made this very clear that we all have to respect and comply with this new measures as they come into effect on this Saturday 8th of August. So please don't be alarmed when you see me wearing my face covering on the screen on Sunday!

I am aware some of you might be concerned about audibility. I am looking into ways to improve

it and we may have to go through some experiments and trial period until we find a satisfactory way.

By the way, as you can imagine, this also means that whenever you come into the church building, you will have to wear face coverings at all times. We won't be required to wear face coverings if we were having our service in the churchyard though unless we are within 1 meter from each other.

Sermon on Feeding the five thousand (Matthew 14.13-21)

I have preached on the story of feeding the five thousand on last Sunday. If you haven't seen the video, here is the script of my sermon.

May I speak in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The story of the feeding the five thousand starts from Jesus withdrawing himself to a deserted place.

"Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew himself from there to a deserted place by himself." (Matt 14.13)

He had just heard the news that Herod killed John the Baptist, his cousin, at the dinner party. No wonder that he wants to withdraw to be just alone. Clearly he is deeply shocked by that news. And yet his plans were interrupted. A great crowd followed him.

Did you ever have a day that started badly and then bad things kept on coming on and on throughout the whole day. If you have ever thought "why do bad things come all at the same time? Then you can relate how Jesus would feel in this story.

He could have said, "Just leave me alone. I have just lost my cousin." But he didn't. Instead he had compassion for them when he saw the crowd.

"He saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick." (Matt 14.14)

The Greek word that is used here, "Splaxna" that has been translated as 'compassion' in our Bible, actually has a very strong meaning. Splaxna refers to a very strong movement of emotion that comes from your gut. The feeling that makes your stomach churn and breaks your heart. That is Splaxna.

Jesus was in deep sadness and sorrow, and yet he was not overwhelmed by his own sadness and loss. He was able to turn his own sadness and sorrow into compassion and mercy for others.

While he was curing the sick. It got dark. The disciples came to him and said,

"This is a deserted place, and the hour is late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves."

But Jesus replied to them, saying

"Why don't you give them something to eat?" (Matt 14.16)

The disciples looked at each other and then looked at the bags they use to carry food. They don't know what to say. What could they say? How on earth are they going to feed five thousand people?

They reluctantly reply to Jesus as they clear their throats

"But sir, we have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." (Matt 14.17)

Do you hear the sigh in that sentence. Sir, we have nothing but these. Five loaves of bread and two fish.

Then Jesus replied to them, 'Bring them here to me.'

'Bring them here to me.' (Matt 14.18)

You see, I think that was the moment when everything started changing.

Before that moment, the disciples were just looking down at what they have got; how much they have got. Not much. All they could see was five loaves and two fish.

Friends, when things are going not well or not as planned, when we are surrounded by difficult challenges, like right now, like this pandemic, it is easy to think that what we can do and what we have got is too little, too small, compared to the scale of crisis and challenge. That's certainly what the disciples thought. All we have got is these five loaves and two fish in our bags and there are five thousand hungry men and more women and children out there. How could we possibly feed them let alone feeding ourselves?

But then, they heard Christ 'Bring them to me.' And so they did.

"He took 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."(Matt 14.19-20)

Friends, right now, in this global pandemic, in this prolonged lockdown, you might feel that all you have got is just a few loaves and a few fish. Any chance that Jesus is telling you the same as he did to his disciples? Bring them to me.

We cannot solve all the problems we have or help every single person in need. What we have got might be just as same as a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish. But we can bring them to God. That is what Christ is calling us to do. Bring them to me.

When we bring what we have got to God and share them with others, no matter how small or how little they might be, God will bless them, God will use them and use us to feed the hungry and heal the sick.

The disciples were only looking down at what they have got. But they heard Christ. They brought what they have got to Christ. Christ looked up to heaven and blessed them and gave them to the disciples.

The disciples looked down and only found five loaves and two fish. Christ looked up to heaven and found the grace and blessing of God.

Psalm 121. "I lift up my eyes to the hills from where will my help come? MY help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth."

Friends, these days when we look around we see on the one hand, Covid, the stock market crashing, on the other hand we see some people panic buying. We see people, including ourselves having to deal with anxiety, depression, frustrations and money. When we look around and all we see are all our enemies or things that try to harm us, we can lift our eyes and look up to heaven just as Christ did. We can bring all our problems and struggles to God. And he will transform them through which we can share his blessing, his grace and love with each other.

Remember our God is the God who can transform the mere bread and wine into the precious body and blood of Christ, when we bring them to him. He calls us today to do the same. Bring them to me.

I would like to share one interesting fact about this story and then I will conclude this sermon. You know, when the disciples finished feeding all the crowd. Do you remember how much was left? The Bible says,

"They took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full."(Matt 14.20)

Why twelve baskets? I think this was a message for disciples. The twelve disciples, they thought

what they had so not enough to feed even one of them. But when they brought them to Christ, and shared what they have got with others in the name of Christ, everyone was filled. And there were even twelve baskets left, one basket for each one.

Could it be a message to us today? In this crisis, while some people are driven by fear, stock piling toilet rolls and canned food, God tells us to share what we have got with those who are in need. He tells us to bring them to him. And when we do that, he will bless our hands and our humble offerings through which the hungry will be fed and the weary will be revived. Its not how much we have got that matters but how we share them and how we offer them to God so that when we share what we have got with others, they may know God's love and his grace through our service. Then perhaps we may find just as the disciples did that they are twelve baskets full, left, which will be more than enough to fill our hunger and quench our thirst. Amen.

Prayer Requests

Please pray for Evelyn Stafford who has been hospitalized and now in the Abington Ward after having a fall. Unfortunately I can't go in to see her as the hospital is still strictly in lockdown. The only exemption that a parish priest can go in is when there is an urgent request from a parishioner for the last rite from her/his parish priest. But apart from that, we are not allowed to visit. However I have asked the Hospital Chaplain, Revd. George and his team to go and pray with her and let her know that we are praying for her. He will go and see her this afternoon.

Please also pray for Robert and Wendy. Robert has been hospitalised last week after experiencing a symptom that appeared to be a stroke. They are still carrying out tests for diagnosis. I am very grateful to Jane and Liz for their pastoral care and practical support. Robert is now staying in Walter Tull ward. If you would like to offer any help or support, please contact our Lay Pastoral Minister, Liz Kelly at lizmk@outlook.com. She will be able to connect you to Jane or a member of Robert's family.

Zoom Prayer Group

The Zoom Prayer Group, led by Liz Kelly, continues. They gather every Thursday at 10 am on Zoom. Here is the link.

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86791215017?pwd=NjlGRTRpaG5ZUDITN0VkZkNGSzd1Zz09>

Meeting ID: 867 9121 5017

Passcode: 357207

You can also join by phoning the numbers below.

One tap mobile

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It is going to be very warm around this weekend. I hope you all have a lovely weekend. Please take an extra care to stay safe. May God bless you all and your family.

With love in Christ

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