

Bible reading: [Luke 9:1 – 17](#)

For the last couple of Sundays we have been looking at Jesus as he shares a meal with various people in Luke's gospel. We began in Luke Chapter 5 where Jesus calls Levi the tax-collector to follow him. Levi then invites Jesus to dinner along with other tax-collectors and sinners. Then last Sunday we were at the home of Simon the Pharisee who had invited Jesus to dinner – and that dinner party was suddenly interrupted by a sinful woman.

These were certainly memorable meals.

(1) What we are looking at this morning is not only a memorable meal but also a miraculous one – namely, the feeding of the 5,000.

Okay, let's work our way through this passage and I trust the Lord will speak to us as we do so.

Over the last 4 Chapters or so of Luke's gospel, Jesus' public profile has simply exploded – he has gone around the Galilee region preaching and proclaiming the kingdom of God and effectively saying that God's kingdom and God's King is here, and all are welcome – even tax collectors and sinners (2). And his message has been validated through miracles of healing and casting out of evil spirits and calming storms by his word (3) and even raising a dead girl to life (4). As well as teaching with an authority that people have never heard before (5).

And at the start of Chapter 9 we have Jesus' disciples doing the same things that Jesus has been doing because they have been given power and authority from Jesus to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.

And as you can imagine, this has not gone unnoticed.

(6) News of this has even reached King Herod – although he’s a bit of a puppet king, he still yields a significant amount of power.

However, Herod seems quite troubled about it.

Herod says, ***‘I beheaded John the Baptist, so who then is this I hear such things about?’***

And that is the key question at this point in Luke’s gospel and Luke wants us to be confronted with that same question.

‘Who then, is this man Jesus?’

In many ways, the feeding of the 5000 comes as a direct answer to that question.

Look at verse 10, ***‘When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus what they had done.’***

Try and picture that scene if you can. The apostles have been sent out by Jesus to heal the sick, to cast out demons and to proclaim God’s kingdom – in other words, to do the same things Jesus has been doing for the last 4 chapters.

I want you to imagine the conversation as they returned. They would have been absolutely buzzing.

(7) ***‘Jesus, you wouldn’t believe what we’ve seen and what we’ve done. You should have seen it Jesus. I was walking along and there was a cripple by the roadside and so I went over to him and prayed for him in your name, and guess what, he just rose to his feet and started jumping and dancing and praising God.’***

And then someone else interrupts and says, ***‘yeah and there was a woman who was shouting and screaming and foaming at the mouth and I told the demon to get out of her and then she just started smiling and laughing and hugging me like crazy.’***

'Oh yes,' said someone else, ***do you remember the look on the face of the young couple when we told them about Jesus and the kingdom of God – it was priceless, I don't think I'll ever forget it – they were like little kids in a sweetshop – so excited to hear the life-giving message of God's kingdom.***

And on and on it would go with story after story after story.

(8) And I imagine Jesus standing there smiling. Of course, they would be excited but I imagine they were also pretty exhausted and so we read in verse 10, ***'Jesus took them with him, and they withdrew by themselves to a town called Bethsaida.'***

Jesus takes them off for a retreat – isn't that lovely. Jesus and his 12 closest friends alone together where the disciples can have time to reflect and process all that has happened and to pray together as well as rest up for the evening.

(9) Except that it didn't quite work out that way.

Verse 11, ***'but the crowds learned about it and followed him.'***

Again, try to picture the scene.

Your one of the disciples and you realise you are completely exhausted and your just so glad to be sat around in the peace and quiet with Jesus and your friends – perhaps with a cup of coffee in your hand as you share the wonderful things that have happened earlier in the day.

And then you hear voices and your thinking, ***'oh, no. It can't be can it?'*** And it's not just one or two voices but it's hundreds and thousands of voices and footsteps coming round the hill as the people have found where Jesus is.

We know what it's like, don't we? We just sit down after a hard day's work and the phone goes – and you think, will I answer it or will I not.

Or you planned to have a morning coffee with a friend, and you get a ping on your phone – ***‘I’m sorry but can you look after the kids this morning?’***

I’m sure we have all had those untimely interruptions and I’m sure the disciples are thinking, ***‘oh no, not now, not again.’***

But not Jesus – that’s not what Jesus does.

Look at verse 11 again, ***‘he welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God and healed those who needed healing.’***

Jesus meets this crowd and gives them exactly what they need. Some need to be healed, so he heals them. All need to hear his message about the kingdom of God – and he tells them.

And Jesus knows what you and I need as well and what’s more, he has the resources to meet those needs as well.

Let’s continue in our passage, verse 12, ***‘Late in the afternoon the Twelve came to him and said, send the crowd away so they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find food and lodging, because we are in a remote place here.’***

(10) Again, let’s try to picture the scene. It’s now late on in the day – probably about 5 – 5.30pm and the sun’s going to be going down in about an hour, the shadows are lengthening.

The disciples are hungry and tired.

And just try to picture them standing off to the side chatting among themselves as they watch Jesus talking with the crowd,

‘He’s been talking to them for quite a while now. Do you think he’s going to stop soon – he surely isn’t going to be much longer. That’s what I thought but there doesn’t seem to be any sign of him stopping. I think we are going to have to take matters into our own hands – let’s nominate someone – Peter, you’re going to have to go and say something. Maybe he hasn’t realised what time it is.’

So, Peter goes over and says to Jesus, ***‘Jesus, it’s going to be dark soon, is there any chance you could just wind things down and anyway this crowd must be starving – they haven’t eaten anything all day, we need to think about them. Shouldn’t they go and buy some food and find a place to stay for the night while there’s still some daylight?’***

That sounds quite caring. Don’t you think? The disciples want them to have food.

Not only does it sound caring, but it also sounds very reasonable. I mean, it’s been a long day, they haven’t eaten for ages, and they are a long way from home and now it’s getting late.

(11) What does Jesus say? Verse 13 ***‘You give them something to eat.’***

‘What! You must be kidding – there must be thousands of people here. You can’t honestly expect us to feed this vast crowd. That’s impossible. You weren’t actually being serious, were you?’

But the expression on Jesus’ face doesn’t change. He is serious.

And the disciples can only respond with sarcasm.

(12) ***‘We have only five loaves of bread and two fish—unless we go and buy food for all this crowd.’***

And their right, aren’t they?

I mean, there are 5000 men and we could double that to include the women. On top of that you have the children and given that the birth-rate was more than 2 children in a family, there could possibly be as many as 20,000 people.

We are talking about a large crowd – an enormous crowd.

How on earth could they possibly feed all these people? It’s simply impossible. All they have is this packed lunch.

So, they look at the scale of the situation and then they look at their pitiful resources and they conclude that it can't be done. There is no way this packed lunch is going to feed all these people. It's as simple as that.

Sarcasm or not, I think this is one of the key principles of Christian ministry and service – that we are fully aware of our own inadequacies at a personal level and our lack of resources as a church.

All we have to offer God are crumbs.

But what the disciples don't know is that Jesus is throwing in a particular story that they would all have been very familiar with. It's a story they would have heard from when they were little children.

Can I encourage you to take the Bible in front of you and find the book of 2 Kings in the Old Testament – 2 Kings Chapter 4 and we will read from verse 42, ***'A man came from Baal Shalishah, bringing the man of God (Elisha) twenty loaves of barley bread baked from the first ripe grain, along with some heads of new grain. "Give it to the people to eat," Elisha said.***

"How can I set this before a hundred men?" his servant asked.

But Elisha answered, "Give it to the people to eat. For this is what the Lord says: 'They will eat and have some left over.'" Then he set it before them, and they ate and had some left over, according to the word of the Lord.'

'You give them something to eat.'

There is also a bit of irony (if that's the right word) in what the disciples say in verse 12. The reason for the disciples wanting to send the crowd away to buy food and get lodging is because they were in a remote place.

The term ***'remote place'*** is the same word for wilderness – the place where God's people spent 40 years wandering around. And what happened during those years – Moses prayed to the Lord and the Lord provided bread for his people in the middle of the desert.

(13) Look at what Jesus says in verse 14, ***'Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each.'*** I can imagine Jesus is probably smiling as he says that.

And we are told that, ***'the disciples did so, and everyone sat down.'***

At this point, the disciples didn't know what Jesus was going to do, but they knew that he had instructed them to have the crowd sit down in groups 50.

I actually find this really encouraging because they are obeying Jesus even though they didn't know exactly what Jesus was up to. People in the crowd must have been asking them why. Why are you telling us to sit down? Why are you putting us into groups of 50? What's going on? And their response could only be a shrug of the shoulders, ***'I have no idea, I'm just as baffled as you are but that's what the Master said.'***

(14) Verse 16, ***'Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, Jesus gave thanks and broke them. (15) Then he gave them to the disciples to distribute to the people.'***

Wow. What an experience that must have been for the disciples. As they are passing this food around it is literally multiplying in their hands.

(16) In fact, there was so much food that we are told that they all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. 'Who is this guy? Who is he?'

And suddenly we find ourselves back at the question that King Herod asked at the start of the chapter.

And there can only be one answer to that question.

Yes, Moses and Elisha were prophets and messengers of God and God provided food for the people through them but here it is very clear that Jesus is the one providing the people with food.

Who is this? None other than God himself – the Lord of creation who has infinite resources.

So much so that they end up gathering 12 basketfuls of left-over food.

What are we to make of this miraculous meal?

We have the disciples who have had an exhilarating day where they have seen people being healed and set free from demonic spirits. It's been a day like no other for the disciples and they can't wait to tell Jesus all about it.

(17) Then we have this vast crowd of people who are a long way from home. They are hungry, and on top of that, it will soon be dark. So, the disciples want Jesus to send them away so they can get food and lodging – which as I said, seems very reasonable and even caring, but Jesus says to them, ***'you give them something to eat.'***

Does that seem a little harsh to you? Shouldn't Jesus have said, ***'You're right guys, I know how tired you all are, just leave it to me, I'll go and explain the situation – I'm sure they'll understand. Just wait there, I'll be right back.'***

Instead, he said, ***'You give them something to eat.'***

That must have been an uncomfortable moment for the disciples. They certainly weren't expecting Jesus to say that, but you get the sense that Jesus wants to stretch their faith and pull them out of their comfort zone. It almost feels like a test.

'You give them something to eat.'

And they said, ***'All we've got is five loaves and two fish.'***

Was that an excuse? Was that their get out of jail card? Or was it a genuine expression of their own inadequacy?

I can only assume it was the latter. In other words, they are saying we would, but we can't. We would love to but it's impossible.

We can't feed them because we don't have enough food to feed them – all we have is this packed lunch.

'Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each.' Again, I think Jesus has a twinkle in his eye at this point.

'The disciples did so, and everyone sat down.'

In other words, they obeyed without knowing what Jesus was going to do. They didn't know why they were to get them to sit down in groups of 50.

'You give them something to eat.'

What did Jesus do? He took bread, he gave thanks, and he gave it to the disciples to distribute to the crowd.

And the disciples are the ones who end up feeding the crowd.

Even though it seemed utterly impossible they end up doing the very thing Jesus asked them to do - ***'You give them something to eat.'***

I think the key to this miracle and perhaps the challenge for us, is that the disciples allowed their faith to be stretched even if it was uncomfortable?

They recognised their own inadequacy and lack of resources - ***'All we've got is five loaves and two fish.'***

And they were prepared to say yes to God without knowing all the whys - ***'The disciples did so, and everyone sat down.'***

'You give them something to eat.'

I want to finish this morning with this quote from John MacArthur which reminds us that God accomplishes great things with very little.

(18) 'God used the tear of a baby to move the heart of Pharaoh's daughter. He used a shepherd's stick to work mighty miracles in Egypt. He used a sling and a stone to conquer a nation. He used a little girl to lead Naaman to Elisha. He used a widow with a little meal to sustain a prophet. (19) He used a little child to teach his disciples the meaning of humility and salvation. He used Balaam's donkey to preach his truth, and the jawbone of another donkey to slay 1,000 men. He can use a small thing for a great end. Jesus likes to have the weak; that way, when things happen, we know it's his power.' – John MacArthur.

(20) 'You give them something to eat.'