

## **Sermon at Brockenhurst 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2020**

### **Matthew 14:13-21**

#### **The Feeding of the Five Thousand**

So why did Jesus host the biggest free picnic the world has ever known?

Matthew appears to tell us that the answer is because Jesus had compassion on the crowd that was before him.

But there was also another deeper and more profound reason.

The primary purpose of this miracle was to reveal Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God - for in feeding the five thousand, Jesus was repeating one of the greatest acts of God in the Exodus – when the Israelites were fed in super abundance with bread from heaven.

In this miracle Jesus is pointing to his true identity so that those who understood and made the connections wouldn't seek simply to have their stomachs filled, but to give their lives to him in faith and trust - not as some kind of celebrity crowd pleaser - but as God Almighty the source of all good things.

I want you to imagine for a moment that you are on the Social committee of Brockenhurst Parish and that you've helped to organise a BBQ for 20 or so people from one of our various groups.

For some reason the news has got out that this is going to be a fantastic event and that instead of 20 people turning up - 1000's do - it's more like a carnival than coffee after a service.

How would you feel if on coming to me and asking, probably somewhat in a panic, what should be done, I

simply responded, 'You feed them all.'

I imagine that you might feel frustrated, angry, helpless - like running away and hiding and having nothing to do with it.

And that's the point of Jesus' response to the disciples when they came and told him, 'Send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.' and he said, 'They need not go away; you give them something to eat.'

On hearing these words imagine how the disciples would have felt.

There was nothing they could do - they had so little - just a few loaves and fish to feed thousands - impossible, ridiculous nonsense they must have thought!

But for God - just as before in the Exodus - such things aren't impossible, ridiculous nonsense.

And herein is the point of the miracle - those disciples needed God in Jesus to feed the hungry - there was nothing they could do by themselves that would have made the slightest bit of difference - only God, in Jesus, could do what needed to be done.

And it's the same for us - we need God - only he can do what needs to be done in our lives and in the lives of others.

And yet so often we try and do things without God, in our own strength and own way and wonder why we fail.

In the recovery programme for Alcoholics Anonymous the first step to sobriety is taken when addicts openly admit that they are powerless to help themselves; that their life

has become unmanageable and that they need to accept the need to reach out to a higher power than themselves.

Such a step and such an admission generally comes very painfully and only after years of denial and failure.

The problem for addicts is only further compounded, when they seek to eradicate their addiction solely by exercising their own will power.

While such a response and such a course of action would seem in the eyes of most people to be commendable, in practice it only serves to reinforce the illusion that it is by our own strength of will that we are able to overcome our failings and weaknesses and that self-improvement is within our own control.

Yet in practice - through bitter experience and after many failures - the realization inevitably dawns, informing us in

no uncertain terms, that there are areas in our make-up which we are powerless to change.

One of the more beautiful collects or prayers in the Book of Common Prayer spells out and freely admits to this 'powerlessness', openly acknowledging that 'we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves'.

In telling those first disciples to feed the five thousand men (plus who knows how many additional women and children) with a few fish and loaves, Jesus was confronting their self-reliance - as he is confronting ours today.

To do the big things that need to be done in our lives - to truly set us and others free to be the people we were made to be, we need God - or as the Prophet Zechariah records "'Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit" says the Lord'.

However another hidden and amazing truth that the feeding of the 5000 reveals is that just as we need God, so he also needs us.

The disciples couldn't feed the 5000 without Jesus, but Jesus couldn't feed the five thousand without the disciples first bringing to him the small gift of fish and loaves and then taking what he had broken and blessed back to the people.

Matthew writes, 'The disciples replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish."' Jesus 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.'

This is what Jesus asks of us.

To acknowledge that we can do nothing without him.

To acknowledge that he is God and that in our weakness we need him.

To come to him with our small gift that we so often try to use in our own strength.

To offer it to him to be blessed and broken that it might bring life to others.

We may feel that our gift, whatever it may be, is very small and insignificant - like five loaves and two fish to feed thousands - but when we are willing to give it completely to God it can be a blessing to many.

So much so that in the feeding of the thousands 12 baskets full were left over.

God's economy is marked by superabundance – super generosity - there really is enough to go around when we are all willing to play our part.

So let's stop that seductive self-reliance that so often pervades our lives and start relying more on the God who can feed thousands with the small gifts that are given freely into his care.

If we really start living like this who knows what amazing things we might achieve together! Amen.