

Carol Elsasser - 2 August 2020

Matthew 14: 13-21

The sums don't add up

This is such a familiar story - the feeding of the 5 thousand, partly because apart from Jesus' resurrection this is the only miracle that is found in all four of the gospels. So all the writers must have believed that the messages within it were essential for us all to hear.

One of the key messages from this story is that limited resources plus Jesus equals more than enough. God is big enough to shatter our finite expectations and abundantly provide for our needs.

There was a need - there were thousands of hungry people – as an aside although this is referred to as the feeding of the 5,000 this number only included the men so once you add in all the women and children who would have been there too - the actual number fed might have been in excess of 15 thousand!

The disciples saw the need – the hungry crowd – and turned to Jesus to ask him what to do. Jesus could have just provided the food (remember the wedding at Cana and all the wine) – but this time he told the disciples to meet the need themselves.

But they only had a young boy's lunchbox of 2 fish and 5 loaves, such limited resources, but with Jesus's involvement everyone had more than enough. Jesus met the need. Little is much when God is in it. God multiplies our offerings, even – or especially – when the task seems overwhelming.

We also learn in this story about trust - the disciples had to trust Jesus that he would provide the means to feed the crowd, thousands of hungry people could have risen up and turned nasty and caused a major problem for the disciples. However their faith meant that through their trust they became part of God's plan to bless others.

Jesus fed the crowd through His disciples – they handed round the food - and we can use this as an illustration of how we too can be the hands and arms of God.

If we have our eyes open to the needs of our community and we have the willingness to meet those needs then that should be our starting point. We shouldn't let our response be limited by what resources we have to start with, but rather focus on what the need is. Whatever we have – limited people, money, whatever - we put into Jesus' hands and anything can happen.

Identify the need, meet the need, involve Jesus. We are not expected to do it in our own power but to invite Jesus to work with us and through us and look to God for support in difficult times.

We must never believe that the resources we have or our talents are too little or insignificant to serve God. If we bring ourselves and our gifts obediently and sacrificially God will delight in using us - and them - for His glory. God can do far more than we ever imagine. As the Message version of Ephesians 3:20 puts it God can do anything, you know—far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams!

So God not only wants to meet the needs of His children but he wants to lavish his children with spiritual blessings, even to overflowing. Exceeding our expectations and imaginations. Involving God in all our work enables us to multiply our small offerings.

Now this story also has echoes within our communion service with Jesus taking the bread and breaking it and then giving it to be handed out to all those present in the crowd. It reminds us of the bread of eternal life we share during communion. Sadly during this pandemic one of the things that we were all prevented from doing was sharing communion – but thankfully we are now able to join together and do just that - share communion, albeit in a socially distanced and safe way - and that is really just wonderful.

So in summary today's story reminds us that Jesus magnified the meagre provisions that were brought to him to lavish on the needs of those present. Let us pray that we always look to God for support - to amplify our gifts, money and talents when we bring them to him to enable us to meet the needs of those around us as we feed others the bread of life.

Amen