

Holy Trinity Sunningdale
Sunday, August 06, 2023
Readings – Isaiah 55:1-5 & Matthew 14:13-21

Last week, Revd. Jon said human beings are story tellers. Story-telling is something every culture on earth does. Last week, we saw Jesus teaching the people using stories. The story we read today is not one Jesus told, instead it is one told about Jesus.

Jesus just heard that John the Baptist is dead. John the Baptist who worked so hard to prepare the people for the coming of Jesus and his ministry. But John was also family. His mom, Elizabeth was cousin to Jesus' mother, Mary. They were pregnant at the same time and even stayed together before Jesus was born. Jesus heard the news and he needed to be alone. Matthew tells us that he had taken a boat to get to a solitary place. His intention was to be alone – but a large crowd was waiting for him when his boat landed. So, he put his grief to one side and started ministering to the needs of the people, healing those who were ill.

Then the disciples came to ask Jesus to send the people away. They were not being unkind or unsympathetic. Instead, they thought they were being kind and thoughtful – first to allow Jesus get the solitude and peace he was seeking when he took the boat and second, they were concerned for the people who have come a long way to that remote place. In response to their thoughtfulness, Jesus said, “You give them something to eat.” There's a lot we can unpack from that one sentence from Jesus, but first let's consider the miracle.

How could five loaves of bread and two fish feed 5000 men and if you add women and children, probably 10,000 to 15,000 people and 12 basketfuls were leftover! Have you ever wondered what really happened? How did so much bread and fish find its way into the hands of the people? A school of thought explains this miracle as a sense of guilt and shame that came over the crowd when they saw Jesus sharing the food his disciples had given so they brought out their provisions and shared with everyone as a result of this act of selflessness. This then becomes a bring-and-share party.

Why is there no record of how this miracle happened? Maybe how it happened is not the most important aspect of this story, maybe what is important are the lessons God wants us to learn from the story. This is a miracle story about people who were hungry, and then they were not. This may seem like an ancient story, in a different civilization and reality. Our world may be very different. But there are still hungry people in it. United Nations tells us that more than six million children die of hunger each year; there are around 925 million starving people worldwide, more than the population of the USA, Canada and the EU combined; every 31/2 seconds, someone somewhere dies of starvation. I can go on, but the important message is that there are still hungry people in our world today. And Jesus is still saying to us today, “You give them something to eat.”

The parables and miracles of Jesus always have a double meaning – what they teach us about our relationship with God and what they tell us about our relationship with other people. In our reading from Isaiah, “Come, buy and eat!” Isaiah shouts.

We can look at all what God is offering and decide we cannot afford them, take our money and go and buy from the world things which won't last or we can approach God, holding out our empty hands and have them filled to overflowing.

Let's share some of the lessons this story has for us.

1. We cannot live a Christ-like life while we ignore the compassion for the hungry. Meritocracy says, the poor are poor because they are not hard working or not smart. Jesus fed the 5,000 because he felt compassion for them.
2. Some problems require God's direct intervention. The disciples wanted to solve the problem of the peoples' hunger in a human way. Many times, our expectations of what God can do often are too small.
3. God often begins with what we have. He takes what we bring to him and multiplies it. The food was multiplied in the distributing and sharing. It is in using our gifts and sharing what we have that it becomes multiplied.
4. God is not intimidated by the magnitude of our problem because he alone has the power to meet our needs. The disciples saw the size of the need and the little human resource available.
5. The leftovers show the lavish abundance of God. 12 basketfuls, one basket for each disciple. What they gave, they had again with a great deal more. Jesus telling his disciples to feed the people is only daunting if we don't trust in the generosity of God.

This morning, Jesus is saying to us with a smile: "You give them something to eat."

Let us pray:

O God, when we have food, help us to remember the hungry;
When we have work, help us to remember the jobless;
When we have a home, help us to remember the homeless;
When we are without pain, help us to remember those who suffer;
And in remembering, help us destroy our complacency; provoke our compassion,
and be concerned enough to help; by word and deed, those who cry out for what we
take for granted. We pray in the name of Christ, who himself is our daily bread.

Dolapo Ogubawo