

Sermon 2nd August 2020

God who takes and gives

Matthew 14 v 13 -21 Isaiah 55 v 1-5,

And they brought to Jesus 5 loaves and 2 fishes and Lo, Jesus said blimey Charlie, that's a bit pathetic. Have you not got more than that? Could you not do better than that? I am used to much better quality ingredients than that.

Not so. He took the pitiful offering and fed the people. How? Don't know. That Jesus the Word made flesh can perform miracles is not a big ask for me. I believe in an invisible force that changes lives and people. I believe in a God who feeds us all through the processes of nature and science and through the work of aid agencies feeds hundreds of thousands of hungry people.

It's a strange story but its strangeness is not in the miracle per se but in the lack of repetition. If we had the ability to feed hungry people at will we would think that it was God's will that we do it all the time. There would be queues round the block for food and bakers shaking angry fists at us for destroying their business with our bread breaking antics. But for Jesus there is this story and one parallel incident where he feeds 4,000. What is going on? The people come to hear him. The people come so that he can heal their sick. He does so. Then as the day draws on the disciples decide that the whole situation is getting out of hand and needs managing. Jesus does not agree with their practical sensible solution. He goes for something much more outlandish and earth shattering and feeds the people. What has the story to say to us?

Here is the problem. What do you think is the solution? How will you find it? Jesus starts with what is at hand.

Some people have a difficulty with using what is to hand. They are like the disciples. Church is a real challenge to them. They have a vision of who should be doing it. The bright young shiny people that should be around as opposed to the broken challenged people that are here. Ageism is alive and well and living in the church.

Discrimination because not everyone speaks English well enough to understand what is being said first time. Condescension to those who live with mental health issues. The good news of the broken

body of Christ is that there is room for us in our brokenness and always will be room.

Jesus brought about a miracle with the pitiful offering that the disciples brought to him. I think loads of people would not have been brave enough to make the offering. There is a ring of truth for me that the offering in John's gospel comes from a child. A certain lack of embarrassment in making it.

You can almost hear the adults saying – oh no I couldn't possibly. Hide those loaves Miriam. For too many people perfectionism is a block in the way to making our best offering. What we do has to be the best that we can make it. That is not better in comparison that others. The gifts are placed in his hands to allow his miracle to happen. Come to me as you are however ill equipped you feel. Whatever society says about you. Bring what you have however little it is and I will receive it for my service.

The wider context of the story in Matthew is of another banquet. Herod the king is having a banquet. I guarantee those people were not fed with bread and a few fish. – every day peasant food. The focus of that banquet is on the abundant food and drink and titillation for a few. They eat and drink. They watch a young woman dance. They drink. The alcohol leads an old man to make promises he regrets and a prophet ends up with his head chopped off. One of the banquets is focused on the people and their needs. One is focussed on the few and their overblown desires. One starts with service. One starts with indulgence.

But let's be clear in both there is abundance. In the story of the feeding of the 5,000 there are baskets of food left over. It would be better for our sensible world view of the story to end with...and there was just enough food for everyone. That is not how it ends. Everyone is fed. There is loads left over. This is not a sensible solution to a problem. It is a miraculous heavenly event which tells us that Jesus is the bread not that he offers bread. He is the one who changes our desires not he is the one who gets us what we want. He shapes the people we are and transforms our desires.

The people come to Jesus to get what they want. They want healing. They want entertainment. They want the stories and the excitement of – what will he do next? Loads of people in church still

do that. They are a part of it so they can getpeace, calm. They want the entertainment of what will we do next. The exciting, the different. Jesus though is not our puppet. He is the one who comes to transform what we want. He comes not to give us bread. He is the bread of life.

Jesus takes the bread. Blesses breaks it. Shares it. Come on! Where have we heard that before? Yes. Eucharist. Holy Communion. In other traditions, the breaking of bread. He gave the bread to the disciples and they give it to the people.

Just like now.

He gives to us and it is our job to give to the people. That is not to say that they are not welcome to receive directly from him. They are but if they do not know him, never heard of him except for the purposes of swearing, how can they. We do. We receive, so our job is to give to them. He gave to the disciples and the disciples gave to the crowd. What they did not do is keep for themselves. It is not primarily about coming to him to get fed. It is about coming to him to be changed.

One of the minuses of this time is that we tend to focus on what are our needs. That includes our spiritual needs? Whereas as followers of Jesus our job is to let his love flow from him through us. To acknowledge that we are helpless without Jesus. From Isaiah 'why spend your money on what is not bread? And your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me'. He says. What about rather than putting all that effort in to have our needs satisfied we changed what we needed and recognised that Jesus could fulfil that.