

A Reflection from the Revd Ali Massey for Trinity 8

Today's Gospel reading (Matthew 14: 13 – 31) is one so familiar that we might take for granted that we know it. Its part of our Christian DNA, so often heard that sometimes we don't really hear.

Yet it is one of the few stories that is reported in all 4 Gospels. True, each of the Gospel writers record this momentous event in a slightly different way, focusing on different details of the story, but it is still the same event that they all describe.

When I was thinking about this passage, I was very conscious of the words of the ordinal, we are called to 'preach the Gospel anew to each generation'. I am sure that you will have heard many sermons, with many interpretations of this incredible story. But my hope is that together we hear can God's word anew, speaking to our hearts and minds so that we can act on the challenge that is set before us by this oh so familiar text.

At the beginning of the passage, Jesus has just received news of the death of John the Baptist at the hands of Herod Antipas. John's friends have brought Jesus the sad news of John's death. But they also tell Jesus that Herod was also gunning for Jesus. So, Jesus does, what many of us do when we are sad and fearful, we go away to a quiet place to be by ourselves. To lick our wounds and just to 'be' for a while, waiting for the pain to subside. But so many people wanted to be close to Jesus. So many people wanted to hear him talk about the kingdom of heaven. So many people wanted Jesus to heal them from bodily or spiritual infirmities that they follow him and a great crowd gathers.

Jesus, despite his own pain, has compassion on the crowd. He teaches and heals all day. When evening comes the disciples come to Jesus asking him to dismiss the crowd, so they all can go and find some food. They too had had a long tiring day, they wanted to rest and have a meal together.

But Jesus asks *them* to feed the crowd. A huge undertaking. The disciples can only see the logistical difficulties of feeding all those people.

The disciples despaired over what they *didn't* have. Philip sizes up the crowd and said that it couldn't be done financially – they didn't have the 200 denarii (8 – 9 months wages) to feed the crowd, nor would the local town have enough provisions to feed the crowd, even if they did have the money.

Then the disciples despair over what they *did* have. One small boy, willingly gave up his packed lunch to help – that was all they had. It would have been enough to satisfy one child but definitely not enough to feed anyone else.

They also despair over the humble nature of the boy's gift. 2 small fish, maybe like a pair of sardines, and 5 barley loaves – barley being cheap and usually reserved for animal feed. 2 small fish and 5 poor quality rolls was all they had.

The disciples' human understanding of the situation caused them to despair of the enormity of the task at hand, so they suggest that Jesus sends everyone away. On a purely human scale we can all understand the impossibility of the job that Jesus has set them. But I wonder, did Jesus already know what he was going to do? He understood the disciples' human despair, but he takes their despair upon himself and transforms it into a miracle.

I wonder, if one of the reasons that all 4 Gospels include this story, is to remind us that when we face a challenge that we feel we simply do not have the resources to accomplish, when we are despairing of a solution, then we should stop and offer the situation to Jesus. To trust him with it, to give him our sparse resources and to ask his blessing on the situations that we face.

When the disciples were faced with this particular challenge, they simply looked at a seemingly impossible situation. They worried about the logistics and the quality of the resources. But Jesus' concern was for the people. Not just their physical hunger that needed to be satisfied, but their spiritual hunger that had driven them to follow him without making any provision for their bodily needs. Jesus' focus was on the whole person, multiplied several thousand times. He wasn't bitter or resentful that all those people had interrupted his time for rest and seclusion. He was moved with compassion for them. His strong and deep love for the whole of humanity demonstrated by his love for the 5000.

His love for them transformed into practical action. He gave of himself completely, teaching them about the kingdom of God and healing those who were struggling in body, mind or spirit. Even though he was tired, sad and afraid, his love and compassion for them gave each of the crowd just what they needed.

Jesus wasn't concerned about logistics or resources, his only concern was for the people. They mattered to him so much more than his own needs or even the impossible task of feeding so many with so little.

And I think that is the challenge for all of us in this story. When we are in a seemingly impossible situation, are we just concerned about the logistics and the practicalities? Or, do we stop and pray, and see if it is *us* that needs to change rather than the situation? To ask God, "what is your desire Lord in this situation rather than mine?". Can we, like that young boy, bring what we have to work with to Jesus and ask his blessing on what we have to share?

Last week's Gospel included parables of exponential growth. Tiny mustard seeds that grow into big trees. Yeast, that wonderful micro-organism that can cause flour and water to grow into enough bread to feed a village.

So, I wonder if the lesson for all of us in this story, is what would or could we do for God, if we knew that by asking Jesus' blessing it would be miraculously multiplied? What would we give of ourselves if, we trust that our small offerings were blessed by the Son of God, and transformed by him to achieve the seemingly impossible?

We all have something special to offer. Something that God has given only to us. Something that we might feel is so small and insignificant that it 'couldn't possibly be of worth or use'. But that gift, that blessing from God, can be like faith the size of a mustard seed or a tiny sachet of yeast. We mustn't underestimate the power of God's Holy Spirit to transform and energize those gifts. Can we offer them with an open heart and mind? Are we prepared to allow God to work in and through us? Are we brave enough to do the work that God needs you and me to do? Jesus needs us all to do that unique thing that God has put on our hearts to help bring about the kingdom of God in this place and this time.

In Jesus' name

Amen.