

A Reflection from Revd Ali for Sunday 25th July 2021 ~ Trinity 8

Our Gospel reading (John 6: 1 – 21) contains two mind-boggling miracles. Firstly, Jesus took a child's lunch and shared it with over 5000 people. Each of the people there that day, didn't just get a mouthful to keep them going. They each ate enough to satisfy their hunger, and yet there was still so much left over - 12 full baskets of leftovers! Jesus asked his disciples to gather up all the scraps, nothing was to be wasted, nothing is ever wasted in the economy of heaven. Jesus, in his compassion for the hungry crowd demonstrated the transformative power of God that provides more than enough for us all. Even in the face of seemingly inadequate resources and lack of faith on the part of his disciples (John 6: 7, 9). Jesus had fed the people spiritually by his teaching and healing and then, in the power of God, he fed them physically too. Jesus provided for all their needs. The miracle that day witnessed to Jesus as the sustainer of physical life as well as the source of spiritual life.

Later, Jesus went away by himself to spend some time with God. John tells us that Jesus withdrew from the people that had witnessed the miraculous feeding, as he was concerned that the crowd would try to 'come and make him king by force'. The people of God were waiting for the Messiah. The one promised by the prophets. The one that would come and unite the people of God and throw off the oppression of the Roman Empire. They may have been expecting a warrior king, who would raise up an army to rid the people of God from occupying forces. Or a skilled politician who would unite the tribal factions into a cohesive people, who could wrest control from Rome. But as we know, Jesus wasn't that kind of Messiah. Jesus was God's very self. God incarnate. God with us, Immanuel. The Messiah who brought salvation to the world not just for the people of Israel. The one who changed everything by his life, death and resurrection. The Messiah who was perhaps, even more surprising than feeding 5000+ folk with 2 small loaves and a few fish!

Whilst Jesus was alone with God, we heard that the disciples rowed out on the waters of Lake Galilee. If you have ever been fortunate enough to visit Lake Galilee, you will know that at its widest point, the lake is 8 miles wide! This was no mill pond or ornamental lake. But an area of inland sea where the wind could whip up the waves and create a treacherous environment. The disciples were well on their way into the middle of the lake when Jesus walked out on the water to join them.

Despite having witnessed the miraculous feeding of the 5000, this new miracle was too much even for the disciples. They were petrified! In Matthew's version of this event (Matthew 14: 26) he described the disciples as terrified because they thought Jesus must have been a ghost. But when they realise that it is actually Jesus, they invite him into the boat and incredibly they are transported to the far side of the lake. Jesus, by his presence, defied all laws of nature. I can't imagine how the disciples must have felt witnessing the power of God through their friend and teacher, Jesus.

Both of our readings today, tell us something about God's truth. Our reading from Ephesians (Ephesians 3:20) reminded us that God's power is 'able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine'. All our points of reference come from our human experience. We cannot grasp the enormity of the power of God, but we can glimpse something of that power through Jesus' miracles.

At the picnic Jesus demonstrated God's abundant generosity, which gives us far more than we could possibly ask for or imagine. By walking on water and rescuing the disciples from the stormy waters of the lake, the disciples found themselves out of danger and in the presence of a miracle that defied the laws of nature. Showing them and us the 'love of Christ, that surpasses knowledge'. A love for each of us that is so wide, long, high and deep that it is beyond our human understanding (Ephesians 3: 18 – 19). A love that is so abundant and generous that our minds cannot comprehend the full enormity of that love. God's love for God's creation is such that God

wants us to be 'filled with the fullness of God' (Ephesians 3: 19). God wants to pour God's grace into our lives until it spills over the edges and helps us to transform our communities.

Our Gospel reading shows us, that when the power of God is present in the world, change happens. That change can happen miraculously, but God also needs us all to be willing to open our hearts and minds to accept God's grace to be part of that change. To be prepared to be filled to overflowing and to let that generosity and grace change us. Change us from people who live for ourselves, to people who live for God and each other. It is a big leap of faith – almost as big as walking 3 or 4 miles on water – but nothing is impossible with God.

As well as celebrating God's goodness in providing our 'daily bread', we also need to accept the challenge of responding to a needy, hungry world. Not with hopelessness and feelings of inadequacy, but with faith that God can use, even us, to bring comfort and hope. After all, I am sure that the young boy who gave up his packed lunch was probably as surprised as anyone at the impact of his limited resources had on so many people. Nothing is wasted in God's economy, it was all thanks to God's miraculous, grace filled power. So, my prayer for all of us, is that we are all ready to be receptive to be filled with God's abundant grace and be prepared to be God's agents for change in this place and this time.

In Jesus' name

Amen