

Matthew 14.13-21

PRAYER

Father may these spoken words be faithful to the written word and lead us into the living word, Jesus Christ our Lord - Amen

SERMON

Some years ago, I went to see Katherine Jenkins at a concert at the Quarry in Shrewsbury. It was pretty much bringing your own seats on a first come first served basis. We were let into the Quarry about two hours before the concert and most of us had bought food. My friend and I had a bit of Sainsbury's prepared salad, cold meats picnic on the ground whilst we sat on camping chairs drinking a bottle of wine out of plastic beakers. Close by us was a group of posh people who had quite spectacular table and chairs with table cloths, candles, china, real glasses, several bottles of champagne and a three course meal which they had brought in wicker picnic baskets. On the other side of us sat a group of 6 young people sharing one bag of chips. I don't know if 5000 were there but it was a lot of people.

Our gospel reading is perhaps the most well known of the stories about Jesus. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, all describe it. In a nutshell, In the midst of a wilderness Jesus feeds a multitude. Matthew refers to 5000 aside from women and children (who, obviously didn't deserve to be counted) which may have made the actual numbers about 16,000- 20,000 or so.

There are three ways to understand the miracle. Firstly, that the miracle took place in people hearts to share their food (and it would have taken a miracle to encourage the posh people to share their food at the Katherine Jenkins concert). Second that the meal should be understood as a Holy Communion (although most scholars think this is unlikely) and thirdly that this was an actual event. I am inclined to the third option; I believe that this happened and it happened for a reason. It is such a well known miracle, perhaps somewhere along the way we have lost the significance of what it means, what lies behind the physical production of bread and fish to feed a crowd - to reveal who and what Jesus really was and is.

The feeding of the multitude is littered with references to the, clues to disclosing who Jesus is and there was of course another incident of feeding a multitude and this parable hints at a connection with Moses in the Old Testament and events in another wilderness where a multitude was fed by God with manner from heaven. The sign points to the Kingdom of God being fulfilled in Jesus. In Jesus Moses' promise of the prophet that is to come is realised. It is a sign of the fulfilment of the hope of the new Exodus brought about by Jesus.

I'm not sure how many of those 5000 saw the significance of all of this at the time. They were just hot, dusty and hungry people. Jesus blesses the loaves and fishes, breaks the

bread and gives the food to the disciples who to their astonishment feed all the people men women and children with 12 baskets of leftovers, so abundant is the gift of food.

As I said I'm not sure how many of those 5000 saw the significance of all of this at the time, or indeed if I would if I was there. After a gap of 2000 years or so I wonder if **we** see the significance. So Jesus fed a multitude, I confess I could have done with him performing that miracle at the Katherine Jenkins concert, especially for those 6 young people eating one bag of chips, but I guess that is not the point. 2000 years ago a multitude saw him feed them with five loaves and two fishes but it was a sign that he could feed them in every way, in every respect, physically and spiritually He sustains them not only with physical bread to the extent of 12 baskets being left over but with spiritual life, so abundant in its generosity it grossly exceeds our needs. It will sustain forever. Sometimes it is hard to comprehend what that means, the breadth and depth of Christ's love for us

I was not there in that wilderness 2000 years ago, but I have seen other signs in my own life, signs of the abundant love of Jesus' life giving and sustaining power. The abundant love of his calming presence in times of sickness, abundant love giving hope and a belief of better things in times of despair, abundant love giving courage and encouragement from others when I was afraid. Perhaps you too can recall Jesus abundant love in your life, indications that Jesus was there to sustain and to protect in times of turmoil and of joy. Sometimes it is only in hindsight that we see those signs for what they were at the time.

The gifts God gives to his people through Jesus are spiritual as well as material He will give us the spiritual nourishment to face whatever may befall us. This was the promise Jesus made to those people that day 2000 years ago, it is the promise he makes to us today – whatever our needs, whatever our anxieties, whatever our troubles, whatever our fears, he will provide for us in abundance, his love and his care for us is unlimited this day and always.

AMEN

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