

**KENMORE BROOKFIELD ANGLICAN CHURCH
SUNDAY SERVICE 2ND AUGUST 2020**



The Readings

Genesis 32: 22-31
Psalm 1017: 1-7, 16
Romans 9: 1-8

The Gospel : MATTHEW 14: 13-21

¹³Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. ¹⁵When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." ¹⁶Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." ¹⁷They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." ¹⁸And he said, "Bring them here to me." ¹⁹Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. ²⁰And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. ²¹And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

The Sermon : Rev'd. Jonathan

Some years ago, one of my favourite TV shows was called "Good News Week." It was a light-hearted look back over the news of the week, but what was remarkable about it in hindsight is that, as per the title, EVERY week was "Good News Week", no matter what had happened. No matter how dark or depressing the week had been, they always managed to see the world through a particular lens, so that the show never became "Bad News Week". Just like now, it's all about perceptions: how we choose to see and feel about the world around us.

Today's Gospel passage certainly does begin with bad news. "When Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. When the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns."

The bad news is the death of John the Baptist at the hands of Herod. Terrible news. It's easy to understand Jesus wanting to be by himself to work through his grief, but what sort of mood were the crowds in when they heard the news? Perhaps there was a general mood of sorrow, but sadness can easily turn into anger. I wonder if there were people who wanted to go and see Jesus because they thought he would lead them in a political rally, that Jesus would give direction to their rage, giving the go-ahead to march on Jerusalem, to seek violent revenge on Herod and his cronies, and after Herod, to rise up and overthrow the

Romans once and for all. But when the crowd of thousands does catch up with him en masse, there are no political speeches to whip them up into a frenzy. Instead, Jesus simply responds with compassion.

At this point, it's worth remembering that this passage follows on from all the parables we've been examining in recent weeks, stories which basically have a message about seeing, hearing and understanding - understanding what the kingdom of heaven is like. This story of the Feeding of the 5000 isn't a parable but it does tell us about the kingdom of heaven and it calls for us to hear and understand what the kingdom is like.

The word 'compassion' means 'to suffer together'. Jesus sees their suffering and responds by addressing their needs. He heals them and feeds them – life-giving acts. We're not told what form the 'healing' of the crowd took – it seems unlikely that physically decrepit people would be able to make it from the towns all the way to this deserted place – but the word 'sick' here means 'lacking strength'. There's something about the crowd that moves Jesus to compassion – is it the sense of their powerlessness, that they are like sheep without a shepherd? Perhaps the feeding and the healing will be closely connected. In feeding them so generously, in treating them as if they are privileged, in caring for them - Jesus is healing them.

At some point late in the day, the disciples make the sensible suggestion that it's time to send everyone home or off to buy food. But Jesus says no – you have the power to feed them right now. No one has to leave or go anywhere. Imagine if Jesus were to tell us today that we have all we require to meet people's needs – in our congregation, in our community, our nation, our world. It's always easy to find problems with any given proposal – to adopt a scarcity mindset which says we don't have enough capacity to do something; but Jesus constantly tells his followers to 'let go and let God'.

They promptly produce the famous five loaves and two fishes, for the benefit of all. Giving over something you have that others don't is a very radical thing to do, but it's always the way of the kingdom of Jesus and it counters all kingdoms built on power and wealth. When we offer the little we feel we have, God inevitably blesses it and uses it to bring the Kingdom closer into being.

Jesus invites everyone to sit on the grass, but the word for 'sit' here is much better translated as "to recline" – as though about to share a feast together. The sense is that Jesus is playing the host and the 5000 households in effect are to be his honoured guests.

When Jesus takes the bread, prays, blesses it, breaks it, and distributes it - to anyone with sacramental ears this sounds like a Eucharist, and when Jesus 'looks up to heaven', this sounds more like looking 'into' heaven, once again encouraging us to take his lead, to open our eyes to see, to open our ears to hear.

The disciples distribute what Jesus has given them and everyone eats – everyone is satisfied. In fact, there is an overflow: twelve baskets full. The number Twelve certainly reminds us of the 12 tribes, in other words, all of Israel are able to partake of this feast if they wish. This Kingdom-foreshadowing event is all about abundance, generosity and inclusion – just like the banquet at the end of time, all are invited, no one misses out, there is more than enough to go around.

It's not just an encouraging story but also a very reassuring one. Notice how some of the details of the feeding of the 5000 amplify parts of one of the best known and most reassuring texts of the Old Testament:

¹ The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;
³ he restores my soul.

⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

In the feeding of the 5000, Jesus invites the crowd, invites us, to recline on the green pasture, beside the water, to be at peace and to anticipate a banquet. He prepares a table for us in the presence of all those nasty predicaments that may be terrifying us, and he anoints us as princesses and princes in his kingdom. Our cup overflows.

Let's pray: Lord Jesus, thank you for the abundance you offer, that you are always feeding us and healing us. Help us to use our eyes and ears to see and hear your Kingdom this week, that we may see beyond the immediate problems of this world and work under your authority to offer our talents and resources to others so that together we may make this a Good News Week for all. **Amen.**