**Family Service Talk 10th September 2023**

**John 6:1-14**

***6 Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), 2and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick. 3Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. 4The Jewish Passover Festival was near. 5When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” 6He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. 7Philip answered him, “It would take more than half a year’s wages[***[***a***](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+6%3A1-14&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26265a)***] to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!” 8Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up, 9“Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?” 10Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). 11Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. 12When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, “Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.” 13So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten. 14After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.”***

As you may know, in the Family Services, we are working through a series entitled ‘Sitting with Jesus’. We have already looked at a small part of the Sermon on the Mount and the time Jesus had dinner with Matthew. Today we are going to reflect on the very familiar story of the feeding of the five thousand. Perhaps it is too familiar and we take it for granted that the five thousand men (plus women and children so probably nearer ten thousand in total) were fed with 5 small bread rolls and 2 small fish …. And that there were 12 baskets of leftovers! It is, in fact, an awe-inspiring miracle and surely a clear sign to those present (and indeed us today) that Jesus was someone very special indeed!

So, what is the background to the miracle? Why were all those people sitting with Jesus in the first place? As the only miracle to be recorded by all four gospel writers, we have a certain amount of background information. We know that Jesus had crossed, probably from Capernaum, to the other side of the Sea of Galilee to a hillside (now known as the Golan Heights) near the town of Bethsaida. There he had sat down with his disciples and, from the other gospels we know that it was to be an opportunity to rest and eat after returning from travelling around the local area preaching the gospel and healing people. It may also have been an opportunity to grieve after the death of John the Baptist. Jesus knew their needs and, in His compassion, provided for that need.

However, before long a huge crowd appeared having travelled on foot around the head of the lake to see Jesus and hear his teaching. They had heard of his miraculous healing and maybe even experienced it personally and they wanted to know more. So, regardless of the cost to Himself, Jesus welcomed the crowd and, there on the hillside, He taught them about the kingdom of God and healed those who needed healing. *Luke 9:11*

His compassion is clear again in his concern that the crowd would be hungry – they had come a long way on foot and we read in the other gospels that it was a remote spot and getting late in the day. So, Jesus challenged his disciples to find food for this huge number of hungry people. “Where shall we buy bread?” he asked Philip, knowing that Bethsaida was Philip’s home town.

Now when we get together with our children and their families, there are 22 in total and feeding that number feels a huge task if we are not going to run out of Weetabix …. or apples … or cheese or …! To even think about feeding more than ten thousand people is mind-blowing. And, as a human, it is totally understandable that Philip’s response was ‘we can’t afford it! One bread roll each would cost more than £2,000 in total today! And Andrew’s response when finding a boy with five small rolls and two small fish was equally human … ‘it isn’t enough food’! And I know I would have responded in a similar way – ‘it can’t be done’!

But we heard in the reading that Jesus already knew what He would do and only asked the question to see whether the disciples could see beyond the human constraints to what could be possible with Jesus there. They knew, from all they had seen in the time they had been following Jesus, that nothing was impossible with Him but still they looked at the situation and only saw the problems. And how often do we do that!? We can’t see how to solve a problem so we don’t even try, just like Philip and Andrew. We might pray to God for help but ignore the answer when it involves us …. Maybe we think we just can’t do it.

But, how often does our reluctance to step forward in difficult situations mean we miss out on being used by God in miraculous ways! Philip and Andrew couldn’t see the answer but Jesus knew what He would do. He would accept the small offering from a young boy and from it He would bless more than ten thousand people with all they needed to eat and more. The boy gave Jesus his meagre lunch – it was all he had – and he trusted that Jesus could do great things with it … and He did!

Jesus got the people to sit down, He gave thanks for the food in the way that the head of every Jewish household would do and then distributed it to the crowd.

It is hard to imagine what the people were thinking when the news got round that five small rolls and 2 small fish were about to be divided between more than ten thousand people and that would be their meal!! I imagine most were preparing themselves for a hungry evening, assuming it would feed the first ten people at the most. And then, as word went round that there was food in abundance for all, there must have been total unbelief – it was not possible! But then, when they saw for themselves the food placed in their own hands, when they felt their tummies getting full and when they saw the baskets of all the left-overs, they must have wondered afresh – who was this man, Jesus? They knew for sure that he must be someone special; someone with power and compassion; someone they could trust; someone they wanted to know better.

And what about the boy? How do you think he felt? How thankful he must have been that he had trusted Jesus and given Him all that he had so that Jesus could do amazing things with it!! It didn’t matter that he was only young and had little to offer – he trusted Jesus and did what he could. And that is how we must be too. We must offer our all to Jesus, believing that He can use whatever we give – time, ability, resources – for His purpose and His glory. What a privilege that is!

So back to the hillside near Bethsaida … ten thousand people had been well fed and Jesus sent the disciples to collect up the left-overs – a common Jewish practice so that nothing went to waste. And twelve baskets were piled high with what was left! Jesus knew the people needed feeding and knew how much they needed but He made sure that He provided so much that all were filled and there was still some left. What a wonderful picture of the generosity of God; of His limitless resources; of His compassion; of His desire to bless us and fulfil our every need. This is God with whom we can trust our lives!

Although the feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle that is recorded in every gospel, John refers to it as one of the 7 signs (or miracles) that point the reader to Jesus ….. it provides proof of His power; it reveals his glory to believers; it confronts non-believers with the need to decide whether to believe and it points people to who he was. We heard in the reading that the people said afterwards that Jesus must be the Prophet spoken of by Moses who would come into the world. *(Deuteronomy 18:15)*

But where does that leave us in 2023? We don’t see ten thousand people fed from five rolls and two fish (though it did seem miraculous that we had enough Weetabix for breakfast for 22 by the last morning of our holiday!!) Do miracles really still happen – Jesus isn’t here? Like Philip and Andrew, we look at things with human eyes and declare that things are impossible so …we don’t try … we walk away … we don’t give God the opportunity to perform a miracle through us … we don’t look at the possibility of things that seem amazing being a miracle rather than a coincidence.

BUT … Luke tells us in his gospel that ‘Nothing is impossible with God’ *(Luke 1:37)* and Jesus may not be here on earth but the Spirit is always with us and incredible things **do** happen. We tend to try to explain them away in human terms or as coincidences but someone once said that coincidences should actually be called God-incidences (or maybe 21st century miracles!) Without doubt God is at work by His Spirit in miraculous ways if only we let ourselves see it and believe it.

And if all this is true (and I believe that it is) …. What is God asking of us?

Simply that we trust in Him and are willing to offer ourselves and all that we have in His service …. even when we think that we have nothing to offer or a situation seems impossible to resolve. Then we will find that He will use us in unexpected and amazing ways … for His glory (not ours) and so that people today can still see God at work and be drawn to believe and trust in Him too.

Amen