

Worship at Home for Sunday 28 June 2024

Welcome to this act of worship. Wherever you are as you read this service and whatever your circumstances, we are so pleased that you are sharing in the fellowship of Christ Church by worshipping with us. **Let us begin with a prayer:** Almighty and Providing God, we give you thanks this morning for the gifts of nature, seed, earth, sun and rain and for the work of farmers and bakers. Thank you for sustaining us with daily bread. We thank you, too, for the work, teaching and example of Jesus, through whom our daily spiritual hunger is fed. We come into your awesome presence now to worship you. **Amen**

Reading

Our reading is taken from the Gospel of John, Chapter 6, verses 1-15: *'Sometime after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick. Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. The Jewish Passover Festival was near.*

When 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?" He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). Jesus 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. When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.'

Reflection

I think all the disciples had their moments when they just didn't get what Jesus was saying or why he was saying it. In this story, it is Philip. Philip was having difficulty believing and understanding the meaning of the Kingdom of God though, frankly, who can blame Him? Later in John's gospel where Jesus is telling his disciples about the Kingdom of God, Philip interjects: "Lord, show us the Father and we will be satisfied." Jesus replied "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me?"

Jesus uses the situation here to challenge Philip's faith for, as we read, Jesus already knew what he was going to do. Jesus had seen the large crowd coming. He knew they would become hungry while he taught them. Philip was from nearby Bethsaida and so had local knowledge so Jesus asks him: "where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" Philip is horrified. Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for them all. Anyway, where were they going to get that sort of quantity of bread. Andrew has spotted a boy with 5 small barley loaves and two small fishes. Probably the picnic his mum had packed for him. Barley loaves were the cheapest so they were what poor people ate. Notice that the boy is unnamed. Jesus tells the disciples to make the people sit down. I wonder where the boy sat. Do you think he was near to Jesus?

The people ate and the disciples gathered up the left overs. All scraps had to be picked up as Jews regarded bread as a gift from God so could not be discarded. The crowd knew that God had provided through Moses food and water in the wilderness and Elisha did something similar with bread loaves before a crowd of men. However, the people could not see that Jesus was different

from the prophets. They thought he was an amazing man, yes, just a man, and wanted to make him their king by force - a coup to unseat their Roman rulers. They did not understand that the Kingdom of God is radically different from their expectations of one maintained by military might. Jesus, sensing that they are about to create a kingdom on their own limited terms, withdrew.

This reminds me of the wonderful Christmas carol: "Who would think that was needed to transform and save the earth, might not be a plan or army, proud in purpose, proved in worth...God surprises earth with heaven coming here on Christmas Day".

But what about the boy who offered all that he had brought with him – without asking for any recognition or reward? His contribution was probably unnoticed by the crowds. Isn't that what God wants of us: to recognise that we are being asked to give something and to engage with God and give without any thought or desire of human acknowledgement? I think, also, that the boy took a risk. He offered even though there must have been a possibility that his small offering would be scorned upon. Are we prepared to take a risk and offer even though we think that offer may not be accepted or, worse, derided? Surely the boy at least witnessed the results of his generosity. We hope so. Hopefully he felt blessed by God when he saw what a difference he had made. Do we have the faith to believe that even the little that we can contribute is immense when in God's hand? If we can, surely, we too will be truly blessed. In the words of Paul, taken from Ephesians, chapter 3 and verse 20: *"Now to him who, by the power at work within us, is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen"*

Let us pray

Lord Jesus Christ, using a boy's picnic, you fed a crowd. We praise you for miracles of multiplication: those who spread faith in Christ across the world; those who translate and distribute the Scriptures so that all may read the good news of Christ's love. Use us and our small resources, to nurture and nourish people in bodily or spiritual need, in the name of Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life. **Amen.**

Our hymn is "Come, let us sing of a wonderful love" and can be found at 443 in Singing the Faith:

1 Come, let us sing of a wonderful love,
tender and true,
out of the heart of the Father above,
streaming to me and to you:
wonderful love
dwells in the heart of the Father above.

2 Jesus, the Saviour, this gospel to tell,
joyfully came,
came with the helpless and hopeless to
dwell,
sharing their sorrow and shame;
seeking the lost,
saving, redeeming at measureless cost.

3 Jesus is seeking the wanderers yet;
why do they roam,
Love only waits to forgive and forget;
home, weary wanderers, home!
Wonderful love
dwells in the heart of the Father above.

4 Come to my heart, O thou wonderful
Love,
come and abide,
lifting my life till it rises above
envy and falsehood and pride;
seeking to be
lowly and humble, a learner of thee.

A blessing:

Bless us we pray that we may persevere in faith; walk in hope, and act and speak with love, by the grace of God, our creator, redeemer, and comforter,