

SUNDAY REFLECTIONS

Sunday 2 August 2020 | The Eighth Sunday after Trinity

TODAY'S READINGS

Isaiah 55.1-5 | Psalm 145.8-9, 15-end | Romans 9.1-5 | Matthew 14.13-21



'The Feeding of the Five Thousand'
by John Reilly (based on Matthew 14.13-21)

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‡ In the name of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

This past week has involved a few important family anniversaries. On Monday my grandparents marked fifty-seven years of marriage, and Wednesday marked not only by parents' thirty-fifth wedding anniversary but thirty years since I was baptised, a day filled with consequence even if I can't remember it firsthand. They are moments for reflecting on how much has changed, how quickly the years have passed, and for offering thanks for the blessings that have been received along the way. The same is true for us all - whatever the memory, anniversary, event or significant occasion - we are shaped and formed by those moments in life that make us who we are and the relationships that surround them. In all these things, of course, we believe God to be present - hallowing, honouring and cherishing the important events of human life by assuring us of his love and care. By remembering these things we are renewed both in our relationships with each other, and ultimately with the God who invites us in Christ to share life in his company.

In our gospel this week, in a slightly different way, we are reminded of an important event in the ministry of Jesus, the so-called Feeding of the Five Thousand. I say important because if you look through the gospels, you'll find that today's miracle is the only one that is repeated by all four evangelists, albeit in slightly different and nuanced ways. Nevertheless, if you were to place the stories side-by-side you would discover a remarkable similarity. A reminder that for the early Christians and for the emerging Church that this particular miracle, spoken of and shared by Jesus first followers had particular significance. It was recognised as revealing something that was worth knowing and remembering about who Jesus was and what he had come to do, that wouldn't just be of significance to the first believers but would shape the understanding and faith of all those who would follow after.

This is underlined further when we see Matthew's account of the miraculous feeding in the context of what has immediately preceded it in the gospel narrative. Whereas for the last few weeks we have reflected together on Jesus' teaching through the use of parables, we are now immersed once more in Jesus' ministry and engagement with those around him.

At the end of chapter thirteen we have been told of the ambivalent rejection Jesus endured when visiting his home town in Nazareth despite knowledge of his wisdom and deeds of power, and then immediately before the five thousand are fed the story moves again in detailing the death of John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin, at the request of Galilee's puppet king, Herod Antipas. As such, it

seems intentional - not least because the same is true in Mark and Luke's gospel - that the feeding of the crowd offers a glaring contrast to what has gone before.

While the people of Nazareth and Herod reject Jesus the crowds are magnetically attracted to him, and whereas Herod's feast exposes his selfishness, corruption and wickedness resulting in the beheading of John; the feast that Jesus prepares on the grass for the assembled masses exposes the compassion and concern which speaks of God's presence and faithfulness.¹ The promise articulated as we heard spoken by the prophet Isaiah, that the promise of rest, nourishment and sustenance can only be found not by trusting in ourselves, but in being open to the gracious invitation of the Lord who invites us to find lasting fulfilment in him. *'Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters, and you that have no money, come, buy and eat'*. Here, as in Jesus' actions, a reminder that our fears and limitations about our own resources or abilities are no barrier to the love of God that replenishes our strength and offers lasting food for the human journey.

Such understandable anxieties and worries are revealed in the attitude of the disciples to the crowds, who having followed Jesus from the towns into the desert, seem reluctant to go home. They are aware that it's late in the day, and so they try to fix the problem by persuading Jesus to send the people away, attempting to avoid what might happen if the thousands start to demand something to eat.

On the face of it, it's a natural reaction: we don't have enough food, there's too many of them, quickly get rid of this crowd as really it's no concern of ours. With this in mind, it's perhaps tempting to read Jesus' response, *'they need not go away, you give them something to eat'* as a bit of a hollow joke. The disciples want to devolve themselves of all responsibility, probably aware that the five loaves and two fish can't possibly be enough. Whilst Jesus says that what they perceive as a nuisance is really an opportunity to test the obedience and confidence of their faith; to trust that God is at work, and to appreciate that with his help, they shall have all that they ever need.

As we read, this can only be done when the realisation comes that they first have to bring what they have, despite its meagreness and scarcity, to Jesus. *'We have nothing here, but five loaves and two fish'* they sceptically reply, knowing on the face of it won't be sufficient. Yet by bringing it to Jesus despite their concerns that what they have is too limited, too insignificant, their initial mundane

¹ cf. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, *'Fire of Mercy, Heart of the Word'*, Volume II, p 356.

scepticism is transformed as the small amount of food they have to share is taken, blessed, broken and distributed to the waiting crowds, so that in the end *'all ate and were filled'*.

By listening to Jesus' word, by trusting that Jesus could take, use and bless what they had, the miracle happens.² And much more than that, the miracle happens in the hands of the previously doubting disciples, as they do what Jesus has told them to do, as they share the grace they have received and pass it on so that all have enough to satisfy their hunger. The story doesn't focus on the *how* the miracle happened, but rather emphasises the *who*. Jesus asking his friends to cooperate with him in feeding the crowd, showing what will come about when we offer what we have to God, so that he can use it, share it and multiply it so that others are fed.

Here then, the pattern of the Christian life, of what it means to follow Christ daily, of what it means to be members of his church, is demonstrated not simply in a scene of God's overabundant generosity; but rather in the invitation to remember that before we do anything, we first have to bring what we have to Jesus. We might be convinced it is enough, but as the story tells us, that really doesn't matter. For in spite of our doubting and disbelieving, Christ tells us, God will be at work; not just around us, but within us and through us, sending us, equipping us, encouraging us, so that those whom we encounter might come to know his presence for themselves.

In drawing near to Jesus, we see the God who invites us to come near to him, carrying our gifts and resources, our troubles and worries, so that in the end all may find nourishment and strength. God doesn't need us, but he wants us, to bring what we have in knowledge that with the Lord it is all that will be required. Thus, at the heart of such this important story, so formational for the early Christians and indeed for the living out of faith today, we find not the demanding crowd, nor the sceptical disciples, but rather Jesus himself. The one who meets our needs rather than focusing on his own, the compassionate teacher who brings insight and healing, the host who beckons us to sit down and eat, to receive and then to give, to help and to hope, so that all might be invited to eat and be satisfied.

✠ In the name of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

² cf. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, *'Fire of Mercy, Heart of the Word'*, Volume II, p 365.

I Am The Bread of Life

by Malcolm Guite

from 'Parable and Paradox'

(Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2016), p 56

Where to get bread? An ever-pressing question
That trembles on the lips of anxious mothers,
Bread for their families, bread for all these others;
A whole world on the margin of exhaustion.
And where that hunger has been satisfied
Where to get bread? The question still returns
In our abundance something starves and yearns
We crave fulfilment, crave and are denied.

And then comes One who speaks into our needs
Who opens out the secret hopes we cherish
Whose presence calls our hidden hearts to flourish
Whose words unfold in us like living seeds
Come to me, broken, hungry, incomplete,
I am the bread of life, break me and eat.

The Collect for The Eighth Sunday after Trinity

**Almighty Lord and everlasting God,
we beseech you to direct, sanctify and govern
both our hearts and bodies
in the ways of your laws
and the works of your commandments;
that through your most mighty protection, both here and ever,
we may be preserved in body and soul;
through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.**

First Reading

Ho, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and you that have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.
Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labour for that which does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.
Incline your ear, and come to me;
listen, so that you may live.
I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David.
See, I made him a witness to the peoples,
a leader and commander for the peoples.
See, you shall call nations that you do not know,
and nations that do not know you shall run to you,
because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel,
for he has glorified you.

Isaiah 55.1-5

Gospel Reading

Now 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. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. When 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.' Jesus said to them, 'They need not go away; you give them something to eat.' They replied, 'We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.' And he said, 'Bring them here to me.'

Then 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. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Matthew 14.13-21

Prayers of Intercession

- ▶ for the whole Church - that we as we receive the bread of life and seek nourishment from Christ, we may live the good news of his gospel;
- ▶ for peace and unity throughout the world, for an end to bitterness, hatred and suffering;
- ▶ for those who are isolated, alone or afraid that they may might find renewed strength in the Lord's presence;
- ▶ for those struggling to find hope, that Jesus might fulfil their heart's desires and direct their paths;
- ▶ for our communities and neighbours, that we may love as Christ loves us;
- ▶ for those who feel undervalued and disregarded in any way, that God might bless and encourage them;
- ▶ for all who are sick or suffering, those known to us and those known to God alone, that they may know Christ's healing and wholeness in body, mind and spirit;
- ▶ for the departed, and all who mourn and grieve the loss of loved ones, that we may know the promise of the resurrection and the assurance of life eternal;
- ▶ for glimpses of God's grace in the week ahead, that in seeking the Kingdom, we might know more of Christ's love and joy and peace.

This comes with every good wish and prayer for you all, may you, and those you love, know God's richest blessing.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font with a horizontal line at the end.

THE SUNDAY SUPPLEMENT

CHURCH OF ENGLAND RESOURCES

<https://www.churchofengland.org/>

<https://soundcloud.com/the-church-of-england>

<https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/join-us-service-daily-prayer>

<https://www.youtube.com/thechurchofengland>



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

The Church of England Service for this week comes from The Diocese of Europe, filmed at Holy Trinity, Brussels, the service reflects the theme that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

The service can be found online here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lpK-I2kdT2E>

The order of service can be found here: <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/Walsingham%20Service%20OOS%20VF%20AFN.docx.pdf>

DEC CORONAVIRUS APPEAL

<https://donation.dec.org.uk/coronavirus-appeal>

The **Disasters Emergency Committee** has set up a **Coronavirus Appeal** to help support the millions of people that are being affected by Coronavirus in the refugee camps of war-torn countries like Yemen, Syria and South Sudan. By donating to the appeal you'll help families who've lost everything protect themselves against the deadly new threat of Covid-19. The United Kingdom Government will match the first £5 million donated pound-for-pound, meaning your support will go even further. You can donate using the link above.



RECYCLING FOR GOOD CAUSES

On **Saturday 8 August**, St John's Levens, part of our Kent Estuary Mission Community are hosting a **'Recycling for Good Causes'** between **10.00-11.00am** at the **bus stop in Levens**. This is a chance to find a good home for things that you might have cleared out during the past months. They can accept: **watches and jewellery** (broken, damaged or sound), **currency** (coins, banknotes, UK, foreign or out of circulation), **stamps** (loose, single, albums etc), **postcard collections**, **gadgets** (iPods, MP3 players, games consoles, accessories, sat navs) and **mobile phones**. Please do support this if you can.

DAILY HOPE PHONE LINE

The Church of England has developed a national **free** phone line to help support those who might feel particularly isolated at this time, especially if they have no access to the internet. The phone number is **0800 804 8044** and provides a collection of readings, prayers and hymns that can be listened to, all of which are updated regularly. If you know of anyone who might appreciate this service, please do let them know the phone number and pray that it will be a blessing to many.



A free phone line of hymns,
reflections and prayers

Saints of the Week

Tuesday 4 August

Jean-Baptist Vianney,

Curé d'Ars, Spiritual Guide, 1859

Jean-Baptist Marie Vianney was born in Dardilly near Lyons in 1786, the son of a farmer, and he spent much of his childhood working as a shepherd on his father's farm. He had little formal education but, at the age of twenty, he began studying for the priesthood which he found extremely difficult. Despite his poor academic performance, he was ordained in 1815, mainly because of his devotion and holiness. He served as assistant priest at Ecully and, in 1818, was appointed curé, or parish priest, of the remote, unimportant village of Ars-en-Dombes. From this backwater, his fame was to spread world-wide. His skills in preaching and spiritual counsel earned him a reputation as a discerning and wise priest. His visiting penitents soon numbered three hundred a day. He would preach at eleven o' clock each morning and then spend up to sixteen hours in the confessional. A Franciscan tertiary who reflected the spirituality of St Francis, his compassion and understanding of human weakness often brought him to tears. His love of God and his people ensured that he remained in Ars the rest of his life, despite a call to the religious life and many offers of promotion in the Church. He died on this day in the year 1859.

Wednesday 5 August

St Oswald

King of Northumbria, Martyr, 642

Born around the year 605, the son of King Ælfrith of Northumbria, Oswald was forced to leave home after his father's death and move to Iona where, influenced by the monks of St Columba, he was baptised. Returning to Northumbria in 634, Oswald defeated the British king, setting up a cross as his standard and gathering his men around it to pray the night before the battle. A man of humility and generosity, Oswald worked closely with his friend St Aidan, travelling with him on his missionary journeys and acting as his interpreter. He died in battle on this day in 642 defending his kingdom from the Mercians.

Lord God almighty, who so kindled the faith of King Oswald with your Spirit that he set up the sign of the cross in his kingdom and turned his people to the light of Christ: grant that we, being fired by the same Spirit, may always bear our cross before the world and be found faithful servants of the gospel; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Thursday 6 August

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD

The story of the Transfiguration of Jesus on the mount is told in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, and Peter refers to it in his Second Epistle. Each time, it is made clear that that is not only the messenger but also the message: God's salvation is for all and Christ is that Saviour. The testimony of the law and the prophets to Jesus are given by the presence of Moses and Elijah and the event also pre-figures the resurrection, giving a foretaste of the life of glory.

Father in heaven, whose Son Jesus Christ was wonderfully transfigured before chosen witnesses upon the holy mountain, and spoke of the exodus he would accomplish at Jerusalem: give us strength so to hear his voice and bear our cross that in the world to come we may see him as he is; who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Readings:

Daniel 7.9-10,13-14

Psalm 97

2 Peter 1.16-19

Luke 9.28b-36

Friday 7 August

John Mason Neale

Priest, Hymn Writer, 1866

John Mason Neale was born in 1818 and, whilst an undergraduate at Cambridge, was influenced by the ideas of the Tractarians. He was a founder of the Cambridge Camden Society, which stimulated interest in ecclesiastical art and which played a part in the revival of Catholic ritual in the Church of England. Whilst Warden of Sackville College, East Grinstead, a post he held from 1846, Neale founded the Society of St Margaret, which grew into one of the largest of Anglican women's Religious communities. Neale is remembered as an accomplished hymn-writer and his influence on Anglican worship has been considerable. He suffered frail health for many years and died on the feast of the Transfiguration in 1866.

Saturday 8 August

St Dominic

Priest, Founder of the Order of Preachers, 1221

Born at Calaruega in Castile, of the ancient Guzman family in 1170, Dominic became an Augustinian or Austin Friar and led a disciplined life of prayer and penance. He became prior in 1201 but three years later, whilst on a trip to Denmark with his bishop, he passed through France and came across Cathars or Albigenses. They claimed to be Christians but held the heterodox belief that flesh and material things were evil, that the spirit was of God and that flesh and spirit were in permanent conflict. Dominic formed an Order of Preachers to combat this belief, although he would have nothing to do with the vengeful Crusade that began to be waged against the Albigenses. The Dominican Order spread to many countries in just a few years and did much to maintain the credibility of the orthodox faith in late-medieval Europe. Dominic died on this day at Bologna in 1221.

Almighty God, whose servant Dominic grew in the knowledge of your truth and formed an order of preachers to proclaim the faith of Christ: by your grace give to all your people a love for your word and a longing to share the gospel, so that the whole world may come to know you and your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Sunday 9 August

Mary Sumner

Founder of the Mothers' Union, 1921

Mary Elizabeth Sumner (née Heywood) was born in 1828 at Swinton. In 1848, she married a young curate, George Henry Sumner, nephew of Archbishop Sumner, who was himself to become Bishop of Guildford in 1888. A mother of three children, Mary called a meeting in 1876 at which the Mothers' Union was founded, providing a forum in which to unite mothers of all classes in the aim of bringing up children in the Christian faith. Baptism and parental example were its two basic principles. At first a parochial organisation, it grew steadily into an international concern, encouraging the ideal of a Christian home. Mary died on this day in 1921.

Faithful and loving God, who called Mary Sumner to strive for the renewal of family life: give us the gift of your Holy Spirit, that through word, prayer and deed your family may be strengthened and your people served; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

RELIGIOUS PROGRAMMING THROUGH RADIO OR TELEVISION

Television

- **Songs of Praise** - Sunday - BBC One at **1.15pm** - *a visit to the Olympic Stadium in London, explores the links between Christianity and sport.*

Radio

- **Sunday Breakfast** - Sunday - BBC Radio Cumbria at **6.00am**
- **Sunday Worship** - Sunday - BBC Radio 4 at **8.10am** - *as an early sufferer from Covid-19, the Archbishop of Canterbury's Chaplain, the Reverend Dr Isabelle Hamley, talks about walking with God and the virus*
- **Choral Evensong** - Sunday - BBC Radio 3 at **3.00pm** - *a repeat of last week's live recording of Choral Evensong from St Martin-in-the-Fields, London with St Martin's Voices. This was the first live recording of Choral Evensong since the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic.*
- **Daily Service** - Weekdays - BBC Radio 4 (DAB Digital Radio and Longwave) at **9.45am** - *an act of worship with music and prayers for each day of the week*
- **Choral Evensong** - Wednesday - BBC Radio 3 - **3.30pm** - *a live recording from St Martin-in-the-Fields, London, with the choir of St Bartholomew the Great, London.*