

# The Simple and the Ordinary ...

*... often, where God is found*

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*A sermon given on the Ninth Sunday after Trinity, 6th August 2023 – by the Archdeacon of the East Riding, the Venerable Andy Broom, in Beverley Minster*

*Matthew 14:13-21*

Well I bring you news: England won the World Cup in 1966 (you maybe already knew that); we have a new king, King Charles III (again I realise you may already know that); Jesus fed 5,000 people - one of the problems for preachers today up and down the country is that you already know that as well. It's a gospel reading that is so well-known; it's a miracle, the only miracle that appears in all four gospels; today's text is familiar to almost anybody that has ever been in or around church life.

But this morning we have Matthew's version. So let's just dig a little bit into what he offers us. And you may or may not have noticed but his version is much shorter than the other gospels: he removes a lot of the detail; even the little boy with his lunchbox who offers the five loaves and two fish - no mention of the little boy in Matthew. But what Matthew does do very uniquely is he links it with what happened immediately before. In verses one to verse twelve of that gospel we're told about how John the Baptist had been murdered by Herod. And so the reading the gospel begins, "When Jesus heard what had happened he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place."

Fans of Superman will be familiar with the cry, "Is it a bird? Is it a plane? No. It's Superman!" Except he wasn't a man at all. As you probably know, he was an alien from Krypton who just looked like a man. We must never fall into that trap with Christ: whilst we will never ever quite get our heads around how he could be 100% human and 100% divine, he was 100% human. So when he hears that John the Baptist, his cousin, had been brutally and senselessly murdered, he needs time alone - imagine how any of us might have felt if we heard similar news; imagine the emotions that might well up within us; he felt those same emotions; he was fully man. And we're told he withdrew privately to a solitary place.

But as so often happens, our needs, our preferences sometimes aren't fully met are they? As they say, life happens: we're interrupted. And so for Jesus here, the crowd see him go but they want more of him; they see him heading off across the lake and they realise that if they can rush round the side they can get to him on the other end. And presumably as they go they pick up

other passers-by and villagers; there's a momentum as this crowd rush around to see him. Remember Jesus is still shocked, still in mourning from the news. But we're told when he sees them he has compassion on them and cures the sick.

In recent years our culture has become very big on 'me time' hasn't it? Time for myself; focused on my needs; looking after myself. And I am sure that there is a place for that in our culture and in our lives. But as so often with cultural life, things swing and sometimes swing too far and need challenging. Whenever we are interrupted next, we may wish to recall how Christ responds here: despite being stretched, he puts to one side his very real need for 'me time' to have compassion and to heal the sick. There is a place for self-care and for 'me time', but there's also a place for service and for going the extra mile and putting others first. We need to reflect on getting that balance right when so often the emphasis is all upon us.

So it's getting late, late into the afternoon and the disciples can see a problem is looming. All these folk before them are going to be hungry soon. So they come up to Jesus and they say, "*Send them away so that they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.*" And what does Jesus do? Well, he listens to what they say; he recognises that there's a good intention here; a kind thought; a wise insight; and he invites them to be part of the solution - as he does sometimes with us too, with the disciples and sometimes with us, deliberately stretching and developing our faith if we will choose to be part of the solution to the problem. You see, he agrees that they are hungry and they need to be fed. But he says to the disciples they do not need to go away, you give them something to eat. And so we have this mythical sort of like patting their pockets and looking around and finding that little boy who's got his packed lunch of five loaves and two fishes.

What is Jesus doing here? Why does he ask them to find the solution? That surely is way beyond them? Well of course he doesn't ask them or us, whenever we're asked to be part of the solution, to do it alone. As disciples of Christ we're always being encouraged to remember the divine perspective and the divine presence: the presence of God who by his Holy Spirit can always do more than we can think or imagine. 'But even so, Archdeacon, surely he's being a little bit unfair on these disciples here'. He's asking them to imagine that from five loaves and two fishes, 5,000 or more (in fact, it's beautiful isn't it? Why do only the men matter. Did you notice the very end of the reading? 5,000 men *plus all the women and the children* - way more than 5000 in this crowd.) And he asked them, the disciples, to feed them. Is that fair? Is that reasonable? Well remember, they had been at the wedding at Cana. If you know the story, at the wedding at Cana the jars of water are turned into wine. If Christ could transform water into wine, what could he do with five loaves and two fishes? You see, Christ is encouraging the

disciples to remember what they have seen of Him, to take what they have seen of Him and to grow that in their life with Him.

Too often they and maybe we have real experiences of God but it's just a one-off. We're thankful for it but as it were we put it in a box that we then look back on. Christ wants us to live with those experiences so they are part of our life and journey with Him, forever deepening our knowledge of him and our faith in him - so that divine perspective, that divine presence is something that we're always looking to draw upon and our faith in what he can do in us is growing. That was the lesson he took those disciples on, and it's the lesson I think he wants to take each and every one of us on also, growing and deepening our faith and our experience of him in our daily living.

Well, this miracle is about food and it got me pondering what were the meals that I can remember? I wonder if you look back over your life, do some meals stand out? There were two very contrasting meals that came to mind for me. One was of a fabulous meal my wife and I had at a Michelin starred restaurant in Lincoln. It was just faultless, you know, a meal where every mouthful you savour. And I can still remember that evening to this day. The other event was a full English breakfast in Fishguard: we had got up at six in the morning having walked most of the Pembrokeshire Coast path; we had the last bit to do; we had to get a bus at 09:00; it poured with rain the whole way and we arrived bedraggled in Fishguard at about 08:30 in the morning and found what could only positively be described as a dingy cafe, but it was open and it served a breakfast. It was heavenly at that moment. Two very different meals that I can remember. I suspect that this meal which Jesus provided again more like the latter of those two meals, a very ordinary meal, bread and fish was what a community around a lake would probably eat most days. But I'm sure they remembered that event and that meal. And typically, as with that event at Cana, Jesus gives generously and in abundance. Did you notice there were twelve basketfuls that were left over? But it's an abundance of the ordinary; it's an abundance of what they would have expected, an ordinary meal. And it may be a reminder for us to enjoy and to relish the ordinary; not to be consumed forever with getting something best and better; not chasing after the next experience; the next thing which is better than the last. It seems to me that very often God is found in the simple and in the ordinary. And maybe when we get caught up - and again, sometimes our culture can take us on this journey forever seeking the next best experience - maybe we risk losing sight of God, the God who as I say is very often found in the simple and the ordinary.

So, a very familiar miracle, one that is chosen and recorded in all four gospels which suggests it has significance. It has significance to them all: significance maybe because it points us to the nature of Christ, one of us, as well as being fully divine; significance may be because it

challenges us about our life with Christ. Should we be aware of that 'me first', putting it to one side more often, because it encourages that divine perspective and an awareness of the divine presence that called us to go on with Christ to grow and to learn and because it calls us to live and look for the simple and the ordinary and to expect to find God there.

May each one of us find something afresh in this well-known story and may God be very real to each of us in the simple and the ordinary.

# Reading Text

## Matthew 14:13-21

<sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. <sup>15</sup> 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.' <sup>16</sup> Jesus said to them, 'They need not go away; you give them something to eat.' <sup>17</sup> They replied, 'We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.' <sup>18</sup> And he said, 'Bring them here to me.' <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. <sup>21</sup> And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.