

# Love's Knowledge ...

*... can fuel our passion*

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*A sermon given on the Ninth Sunday of Trinity, 28th July 2024, by the Mission Priest, the Revd Eileen Connolly, in Beverley Minster*

*2 Kings 4.42-end; John 6:1-21*

If I were to ask you what the signs of ageing were, I wonder what you would say. For me, I think the signs of ageing comes when you're with a group of people who are your similar age and the main topic of conversation is your ailments - I can't remember spending as much time in my twenties discussing these things: one of the things that has happened to me in the last few years is I have become wheat intolerant, which means I can't enjoy bread. Our bread. I love it. Both our readings today involved bread and there's quite a lot of it.

In the first reading in 2 Kings, it was the prophet Elisha who transformed twenty loaves to feed a hundred - that doesn't sound too much, does it? But then we fast forward to Jesus, and that was 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish. We're all familiar with the stories, but one of the miracles that John slips in at the end was the walking on water of Jesus. But then did you notice? I'd never noticed this before: right at the end of that John's gospel, it talks about Jesus coming up to the boat and then them wanting him to get into the boat and immediately they were over the other side. I've never noticed that before. So it's a bit like a speed miracle, which is quite unusual. And these are extraordinary happenings, aren't they?

Now how would you explain them? Don't they point to the identity of Jesus, this man who is God? Don't they show his transcendence, his power and his glory in the everyday? But perhaps you are more sceptical and perhaps miracles don't convince people of the power of God. Some would explain them away as natural events. So with the feeding of the 5,000 they might say, 'Ah, the little boy was generous and everybody else was sitting on their packed lunches.' So when the little boy generously gave his food to Jesus, everybody else was shamed. And so they got their food out and started passing it around. So it wasn't a miracle.

We seem to want to have an explanation for everything. But what if our modern way of seeking explanations has left us shallow and hollow, unable to wonder, unable to find the extraordinary in the ordinary? Elizabeth Barrett Browning said it best. She said,

*Earth's crammed with heaven,  
And every common bush afire with God,  
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes,  
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries*

You can imagine the scene: it had been a long day; Jesus was tired; his disciples were tired; the people listening were tired - and yet they wouldn't go home. Perhaps this is the miracle that we often miss, that human beings could see such a sign of hope and healing in this Jesus that thousands of needy people wouldn't go home. They would follow him and they would feel that their hunger for the bread of life had been met.

When Jesus saw the hungry crowd and looked around at his surroundings, he asked Philip, "*Where are we to buy bread for all these people?*" This was an overwhelming problem, and the

resources are few. Now Philip, being mathematically inclined, instantly did some calculations and came to the depressing conclusion: six months wages wouldn't be enough to buy enough bread; Andrew, meanwhile, who must have been the practical one, was going around the crowd looking for what was available. But then, faced with the reality of only five loaves and two fishes, he asks the despairing question, "What are these among so many people?"

So what about you? When faced with overwhelming problems, who are you most like, Philip or Andrew? But they had both come to the end of their knowledge and their ability to see how to solve the problem. But at the end of their knowledge and ability, there was Jesus. And the end of human knowledge is the beginning of love's knowledge. And that was enough to feed the multitude, with many left over.

What about us today? It's easy to look at the world's problems, the overwhelming needs of people around the world and in our locality and in our families. And to become paralysed. To say, like Philip and Andrew, what can I do with so little resources? What difference can I make? It's easy to come to the end of our ability and knowledge and to that place of despair. And yet when we place the needs we face into the hands of Jesus, we hear the faint whisper of love, 'What do you have in your hand? Give it to me.' The 'not enough' is not the final answer, because when placed in the hands of Jesus our human weakness and vitude become more than enough.

Do we believe this? Can we move beyond passivity and choose to trust the one who fed thousands; who walked on water; who raised the dead; and ultimately died - that we might live a life which proves the abundance and generosity of God?

So what about you? What about me? In what areas of my life am I holding onto my issues, relying on my own knowledge, my own experience? In what areas of my life am I trying to sort the issues with limited resources? Where am I seeing the overwhelming problem, rather than the power of the God I serve?

I love characters in the Bible like Moses - God wanted to use Moses to deliver a whole nation of Israel from the hands of its oppressors. But Moses was full of self doubt and insecurity - "I'm not good at speaking, send someone else." What insecurities do you have that you think disqualifies you from doing the will of God? But God knows and He says, place your hand in mine and we will do it together - you are not on your own.

What about the church here in Beverley? Do we actually believe that Jesus is powerful enough to work in the lives of people? Let me tell you, we are seeing this already. God is at work; the 'Missio Dei' God is at work in the world. We just have to have eyes to see it and then to join in and do what He asks us to do.

I want to finish with this - in 1946, when Agnes Bojaxhiu, also known as Mother Teresa, came face to face with the suffering and dying in Calcutta, she experienced what she called 'the call within the call' - namely, to serve those suffering the most. And certainly her knowledge or wealth or wisdom was not enough to fulfil this overwhelming calling. And yet, love's knowledge fuelled her passion. And with that passion she began the Missionaries of Charity, the order which grew to thousands of members giving care in many orphanages. She made a start placing her hand into the hand of the one who loves.

So let us ask God for that love's knowledge which multiplies our meagre resources, that overcomes our insecurities and inadequacies and makes a way forward that relies on Him and His power.

So I would just like to have a moment of silence and in your hearts, respond to God. After hearing his word, let us be silent.

# Reading Texts

## 2 Kings 4.42-end

<sup>42</sup> A man came from Baal-shalishah, bringing food from the first fruits to the man of God: twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. Elisha said, 'Give it to the people and let them eat.' <sup>43</sup> But his servant said, 'How can I set this before a hundred people?' So he repeated, 'Give it to the people and let them eat, for thus says the Lord, "They shall eat and have some left." ' <sup>44</sup> He set it before them, they ate, and had some left, according to the word of the Lord

## John 6.1-21

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. <sup>2</sup> A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. <sup>3</sup> Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. <sup>4</sup> Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. <sup>5</sup> When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming towards him, Jesus said to Philip, 'Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?' <sup>6</sup> He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. <sup>7</sup> Philip answered him, 'Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.' <sup>8</sup> One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, <sup>9</sup> 'There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?' <sup>10</sup> Jesus said, 'Make the people sit down.' Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. <sup>11</sup> Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. <sup>12</sup> When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, 'Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.' <sup>13</sup> So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. <sup>14</sup> When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, 'This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.' <sup>15</sup> When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself. <sup>16</sup> When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, <sup>17</sup> got into a boat, and started across the lake to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. <sup>18</sup> The lake became rough because a strong wind was blowing. <sup>19</sup> When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the lake and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. <sup>20</sup> But he said to them, 'It is I; do not be afraid.' <sup>21</sup> Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land towards which they were going.