

**St James, 10.30am, 2 Aug, Yr A 2026**

**Matthew 14: 13-21**

- Jesus tries to withdraw by boat to a lonely place for rest after hearing about the death of his friend.
- The crowd follows him on foot. Instead of sending them away, Jesus looks at them with love and feels deep mercy, and goes on to heal their sick.
- The disciples want to dismiss the hungry crowd, but Jesus tells them, *"They need not go away; you give them something to eat".*
- All they have are five small loaves of bread and two fish. Jesus takes them, blesses them, breaks the bread, and gives it all to the disciples to hand out. **Everyone** eats and is fully satisfied, with twelve full baskets left over.

And what is remarkable about this, is the timing of this compassion. Jesus has just learnt that his cousin John the Baptist has been beheaded. He is grieving, and, in response, seeks a quiet, deserted, out of the way place on the other side of the lake. Only to be confronted on his arrival by a crowd of *"5000 men besides women and children."* Yet he spends all day healing their sick. And then confronted with a request from his disciples to send the crowd away so they can do some late night shopping for food, he says that there is no need.

Now I don't know about you, but when I am both sad and tired, I am not at my best. Irritable and grumpy. But Jesus only seems to be more compassionate the more he has to contend with.

So what does this miracle say about the character God? I think it says that he is a God of extraordinary compassion, who cares for every part of us. I am struck by how much this miracle, and this day in the life of Jesus is about the physical – about keeping the body alive and well. And for you and I the challenge is how can we show compassion even when we're tired and under stress? How can we live out Godly compassion?

Hospitality is at the heart of this miracle. Matthew records – *"And all ate and were filled: and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, 12 baskets full."*

Matthew sets this outdoor meal in direct contrast with the feast that is recorded earlier in the chapter. The feast that Herod hosts is a feast of death. The feast that Jesus hosts is a feast of life. Herod's feast is for the exclusive few; lavish; riotous; over the top; and ending in the death of John the Baptist to preserve Herod's reputation as a man who keeps his word.

In contrast, the meal where Jesus is the host:-

- is inclusive. No-one is left out. ALL ate and were filled.
- is generous. Not only is everyone satisfied but there are 12 baskets left over – one for each of the 12 tribes of Israel – a pointer to the reality that God provides sufficient for everybody, and then some. God is a God of abundance.
- this meal is the product of scarcity. All that is available is 5 small loaves and two fish. We are told elsewhere that they are barley loaves, the food of the poor – wheat was too expensive. Enough for one, maybe two people at most. Yet Jesus takes these in his hands, blesses God the provider, breaks the loaves and the feast begins. Out of scarcity, God provides plenty. That's a principle God always works with. Even though the resources we have, or our skills, may be lacking, God picks up the little we can offer in his service, and the results can be abundant and miraculous.

- And it is a meal of fellowship. Jesus only seems to hold centre stage for a short time, as he blesses the loaves and breaks them. From then on, it is the disciples who are sent out to give the crowd something to eat. One article I was reading asked the question *"I wonder how the people at the back of this crowd got to know what was going on? They wouldn't have been able to see and hear Jesus. How long would you have had to wait?"* I suspect the word will have been passed around at great pace, from family to family – *"there is going to be food for everybody – I don't know how, but it's happening"* Passing on the good news!

- It's a prophetic meal. Some see this miracle as a pointer to The Last Supper. But also, it was held by some that The Messiah would repeat the provision of manna in the desert as the Israelites journeyed to the promised land. This meal is a repeat of that provision. The message is that this man Jesus is himself the true bread of life. As Isaiah says in our Old Testament reading

*"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."*

Godly Compassion combined with Godly Hospitality make Jesus *"the perfect host"* in this impromptu picnic; an event which encourages us to a way of life where we are motivated by deep caring for others and a desire to share God's abundance. All made possible by feeding on Jesus the bread of life.

We don't need to wait until we feel we've it all sorted. Give Jesus your small amount of available time, your little strength, or your meagre resources.

Jesus uses human hands—the disciples—to distribute the food. He chooses to feed the hungry world through His people

Let's be amazed by the story. Let's wonder about the miracle of Jesus. But let's think too about our mission here in Shirley, as a congregation and as individual followers of Christ. Let's hear Jesus' command to give the world something to eat. And let's realize that we have all we need to make that happen – that because of God's love for us, **we are called and capable** of doing the work of Christ in and for the sake of the world – and that when we do, there will be more than enough of that love and grace and hope to go around – maybe with leftovers besides!