

Mt 14:13-21

Jesus feeding the five thousand

- one of the most well-known and well-loved Bible stories
- only miracle that Jesus did that's in all 4 gospels

so must be important

Why is it so important?

How does it speak to us today?

In his gospel Matthew links his account with Jesus hearing that his cousin and friend John the Baptist has been beheaded. That's why our reading started: 'When Jesus heard what had happened...'

In response to this, he withdraws privately to a solitary place.

Several times in the gospel accounts, we read about Jesus withdrawing from the crowds, sometimes on his own, sometimes with the disciples, to rest and to pray to his Father in heaven.

He was a human being like us. He got tired. He got hungry. He got thirsty. He needed time out. And he needed to pray.

As Christians we are called to love our neighbours as we love ourselves. And we mustn't forget that we need to look after ourselves in order to be any use to our neighbours.

If Jesus needed to take time out to rest and talk to his Father, how much more do we?

So the passage reminds us that Jesus was human like us, but I think the reason this story is so important that all the gospel writers included it in their selection is because it shows us that Jesus was God as well as a man. In the Old Testament God provided bread for his people in the desert and here Jesus shows he's God by doing the same thing.

Just imagine.

Jesus is out in the middle of nowhere with a huge crowd listening to him. 5000 MEN, not counting the women and children.

It's getting late. The people are getting hungry. There's no shops anywhere near.

The disciples suggest he tells the crowd it's time for them to go home for dinner.

It shows us what a compelling preacher he must have been that they haven't just drifted off of their own accord.

And now he says to the disciples 'You give them something to eat.'

And of course they look at each other and start to explain why that won't be possible.

And suddenly Andrew pipes up and says 'here is a boy who has five rolls and 2 little fish'

imagine the looks the other disciples would have given him!

But Jesus tells the disciples to get the people all sat down and then he takes the boy's little picnic supper and thanks God for it.

The crowd must have been watching, wondering what point he is about to make, maybe anticipating a really clever sermon illustration.

And then he is giving out bread and fish to everyone and there is enough to go round

and 12 basketfuls left over.

And they realise that Jesus is no ordinary preacher, however good. This is God himself. God with us. God with infinite amazing power.

Jesus is both God and man.

And that's important because that's how he can rescue us from the power of death and sin.

Our Saviour had to be fully human and fully divine so that he could reconcile people to God.

By this miracle he showed all those hungry people that he was their God, the God who provides, the God who provides food in the wilderness. Jehovah Jireh, as the Israelites sometimes called him, which means just that, God the provider.

And there are echoes of that every time we share communion. In a few minutes Simon will say, 'Jesus broke the bread, gave it to them and said: Take, eat, this is my body which is given for you; Do this in remembrance of me'. At the communion table, God provides us with spiritual food, nourishment for us as we seek to follow him here on earth. A memorial of his death that provided our salvation.

And the manna in the desert, the feeding of the 5000 and the giving of the bread at the last supper all point forward to the day when we are invited to share the feast God will provide in heaven.

God provides.

And there are 2 other things I think we should notice this morning that seem particularly apt for the times in which we find ourselves.

Firstly, never don't do something you can do because it seems too small to be any use. Jesus took a woefully inadequate amount of food offered by one small boy and did such an amazing miracle with it we're still talking about it 2000 years later.

Our world is facing huge problems right now. There is the coronavirus pandemic, the environmental catastrophe and making both worse is the huge unfairness in the way in which the wealth of the world is shared out.

When we look at these problems it's easy to think there is no point in us changing our lifestyles or giving money to the poor because what we can do is too little to make a difference. But that is not a Christian response. Jesus can take our little and transform it into a miracle. God provides.

And secondly, we need to be good stewards of what God provides. Jesus didn't leave the left over food lying around, but got the disciples to gather up the leftovers, presumably so they could be sent home with people, or given to the poor. We need to value what we have been given and use it well, whether that is money, or possessions or skills. Individually we are called to be good stewards of what we have and as a society we are called to be good stewards, in particular making sure that we leave our children and their children a planet able to sustain life.

Let's just ask God to show us one thing we can do, however small, to serve Jesus, our amazing Saviour who is both God and man.

Dear Jesus, God made man, help us to follow you and to do the things you are calling us to do and please take our little and use it for your glory,
Amen