

It's All That I've Got

The 5000 who had come out to meet Jesus were poor. Galilee was a peasant agrarian society, where farmers were taxed highly and often lost their land to the wealthy elite who ruled through the Herodian dynasty or corrupt tax collectors, who were collecting taxes for Rome. Jesus' interest in these struggling people and his empathy for their needs inspired widespread support for his message in Galilee.

No miracle had such an impact on the disciples more than this one, all four gospels have recorded this story, although there are minor variants between them, but the one constant is the five loaves and two fish to feed a large crowd, coming from the small villages and small towns around the north sea of Galilee.

Only John mentions this little boy, but I'm glad he does, for this mention of a little boy spoke to all who had gathered. We don't know the conversation that Andrew had with the little boy, or how Andrew brought the packed lunch to Jesus. But I don't think, I'm stretching my imagination too much, to hear the little boy say to Andrew, "It's all that I've got". It's certainly what I would have said. "It's all that I have, it's not much" – these were Andrew's thoughts to Jesus, "How can this feed so many people".

There are different angles into how we can interpret this powerful story. We can look and marvel at the power of Jesus, being able to miraculously turn the boy's offering into a banquet for 5000, and perhaps that's what happened. If he could turn water into wine, walk on water, give sight to the blind, raise the dead, then I'm sure that he could turn that small offering into a feast and still have twelve baskets left over.

But could it be that there is an even greater miracle than Jesus using his miraculous power, and that is the miracle of human hearts being touched by the grace of God.

As I said they were very poor people and the fact that the young lad had barley bread speaks of poverty. Barley bread was the cheapest of all bread and held in contempt. The fishes would be no bigger than sardines; that day as the boy's mum put together his packed lunch, little did she think that this offering would become known world-wide and remembered 2000 years later, and that this lunch offering would be used to encourage people to share.

For this is another angle into this beautiful story. That when Jesus took the boy's offering, and as he lifted it to heaven and gave thanks, something happened in the hearts of the crowd; a softening, a grace, a generosity descended, and blessed those who gathered. Their eyes were perhaps opened to the example and generosity of this young boy, and their hearts were opened, and they saw the power of sharing, caring and giving, and of how the boy gave his last piece of bread. You see the impact of this would last longer than a meal; suddenly on that hillside, miles away from any place, a miracle happened. I believe that the Holy Spirit descended upon them.

The miracle was that everyone who had brought food supplies for the day suddenly began to share with their neighbour; they laid their food at the feet of Jesus and they gave everything they had to be used to feed the crowd. No-one was left hungry and of course there was so much left over that there was food to spare. 12 baskets, one for each of the disciples, to take back to the villages, to share the food with the hungry people. I believe that Jesus instituted the first Christian harvest service.

For me, this is one of the loveliest events that happen in the gospels, and what I love about it, is the difference that one life can make to a community. Think of people down through history whose solitary life has been used to change situations.

I love the story of the old German school master who, when he entered the class of boys in the morning, used to remove his cap and bow ceremoniously to them. One colleague asked why he did it. His answer was, "You never know what one of these boys will someday become." He was right – one of them was called Martin Luther – the founder of the reformation of the Church.

Jesus said, "Greater love hath no man than this: to lay down one's life for his friends." And, indeed, in almost every culture since the beginning of time, sacrificing your own life in order that others may live has been regarded as the ultimate act of courage and selflessness. Understandably, it's an act only few people are ever willing to make. But, over the course of history, some remarkable people have done just this – they have given up their lives in the hope that other people will be able to carry on living.

One life can change the course of a country. One life can change the world and of course one life did change the world and is changing the world but the world resists change and the world wants to cling to its default position

of selfishness and greed. It has always defaulted back to self-centredness and each generation needs a fresh anointing of the spirit of Jesus to descend upon them.

Jesus went to the Cross and died our death, so that we might live for eternity.

I wonder what Jesus thought of this wee boy and his packed lunch, was he thrilled, overjoyed, proud, that someone understood his message, that someone had a heart for others.

What does it say to us this morning?

I think it speaks of appreciating those that can only give a little – something Jesus loved to highlight, the elderly woman with two little coins placed into the temple treasury, she gave everything that she had to live on, just like the little boy who gave everything that he had – he would have been hungry, away on the hills for the day, listening to a preacher, and he may have been tempted to eat it quietly, but no, he chose to give, it's all that I have, and to Jesus, that was more than enough, for the elderly woman and the young boy gave all that they had.

Our story of the mustard seed is a story that tells us that a small step of faith is all that we need, God will do the rest.

The world is in crisis on so many levels – some are getting wealthier and the majority are getting poorer. Climate change is being blamed for many of these developments, and climate change can be traced back to our enlightenment and progression with science, and the development of industry that was enabled by carbon taken from the ground, and polluting into the atmosphere.

We are all in this together, and no matter what country, it affects us all, for the planet is under threat, our very existence as human beings is constantly under threat, and the only way that this situation can be reversed, is a change of heart, to become like the little boy and share what we have.

Thanks be to God for our younger generation who have a vision for a healthier planet.

Young people like Greta Thunberg willing to stand up and speak up and challenge the authorities. She is a Swedish environmental activist known for challenging world leaders to take immediate action to mitigate the effects of human-caused climate change.

Thunberg's climate activism began when she persuaded her parents to adopt lifestyle choices that reduced her family's carbon footprint. In August 2018, aged 15, Thunberg began skipping school, vowing to remain out of school until after a Swedish election to attempt to influence the outcome.

Amos, in his day was an Old Testament prophet- activist and he had some pretty harsh words to say to his decadent, rich and greedy community, so he tells them,

“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.

And what does the Lord require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy

and to walk humbly with your God”.

In those words, we have our path way out of every crisis in life, whether social or domestic.

Walking humbly with God simply means:

Living in close relationship with our Creator.

Recognising His greatness and our own human limitations.

Seeking to follow His will rather than our own pride or desires.

Serving others through acts of justice, mercy, and love

On this Harvest Sunday, we are again reminded of our human responsibilities, and our need to be willing to give and sacrifice for others.

What is it that Jesus is asking us to give, where are the hungry crowds in our lives? Where are those struggling with poverty? Where are the famines in the world? Where are those living under threat of rising water and natural disasters? – all these are like the hungry crowd on the hillside, in need of a Saviour, and all it takes is one to stand up and say, “Here, is my

offering, it's not very much", but in the hands of Jesus, it can be used to feed a crowd and to mobilise others to give.

The story also contrasts the attitude of the disciples with Jesus. Andrew said, "Here is a boy, with five small barley loaves and two fish, but how far will they go among so many?" He couldn't see a solution! Philip said, "It would take more than a half year's wage to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" He could only see the difficulties!

Jesus said, "Make the people sit down" – in other words take a step of faith, trust me, do what I say. Take the first step!

The disciples could only see the obstacles, Jesus saw the solution, and the solution was there in front of him. The solution was in the hearts of the people. In the hands of Jesus little is always much. If we put ourselves individually and collectively as a church, there is no telling, what he can do with us and through us.

Do we see the obstacles? Do we see the reasons why we shouldn't do it? Possibly, because it's much easier, than having the eye of faith and trusting Jesus.

So let me conclude with this final thought.

On that hill of Galilee, a miracle happened, it wasn't just the miracle of multiplication of loaves and fishes; it was the miracle of changing selfish people into generous people through the sacrifice of the young boy and the prayer of Jesus giving thanks for this sacrifice.

It was the miracle of the birth of love in grudging hearts.

It was the miracle of changed men and women with something of Christ in them to banish their selfishness.

It was a miracle of opening the disciple's eyes to see the power of faith through Jesus.

If that is so, then in the realest sense, Christ fed them with himself and sent his Spirit to dwell within their hearts. They went home fed both physically and spiritually.

Can we leave here today, believing in miracles? And the greatest of these is a changed heart and opened eyes to see the glory of God – something that Isaiah spoke about in our reading where the world of his day would be transformed.