

Trinity 8 Sermon (Isaiah 55.1-3, Romans 8.35, 37-39, Mathew 14.13-21).

“And they all ate and were satisfied” (Mathew 14.20)

During this last few months food, which is always important, has taken on new meanings or rather perhaps old meaning has been rediscovered. You will recall that the pandemic was believed to have started in a food market where practices that would be anathema to the people of Jesus’s time and to right thinking folk of our own day were taking place. The nation is being asked to become a little thinner by a leader who pats his excess belly that made his personal fight for life worse. All creation demands the highest respect and we should not lose sight of some of the lessons being learnt. The animals we eat and the crops we grow should not be at the expense of the planet or our own health. Sustainable eating and living must be part of a healthy future for us as individuals and for us as a race. At a more micro level we will recall among the shortages brought on by panic buying some of the basics included flour, rice and pasta. Staples for our lives. I was fortunate in that because of our monthly Sunday night pizza masses I had a little stock of flour and yeast that I could share and some of you topped that up in due course. Such exchanges are more than a mere calorie barter.

Jesus taking a few loaves and a couple of fish and feeding a great crowd is one of the very best known miracles or signs of Jesus – it appears in different ways in all of our four gospels. In John it is heavily Eucharistic and should remind us that for some, communion is still something denied them. In Mathew which closely follows the pattern in Mark it is a sign of how Jesus responds to the needs, real needs of people. He has compassion (pity) on them – he heals the sick and feeds the hungry. Bread itself is the symbol of life throughout the Old Testament – you will recall the manna from heaven for the Hebrews in the exodus with Moses. It is not just physical food but spiritual. Food is more than calories. The restaurants and chefs that turned their hands to making lovely lunches and dinners for NHS workers were not just giving calories instead but respect and love – and no doubt something more tasty than the regular canteen fill up.

“And they all ate and were satisfied” - Our translation falls rather flat into the calorie fuel category – *they ate as much as they wanted* – yuk. It’s a translation that fails to convey the beauty, mystery and meaning of what is offered by Christ. Earlier on he has spoken to the crowds in a different place with the Sermon on the Mount – you will remember the beatitudes. Amongst them: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be satisfied (not filled up).

Where are we now in the gospel story? John the Baptist has been beheaded as a party trick, Herod is in his palace, his cronies are corrupt henchmen, the yoke of Roman rule is played out through puppet rulers and religious leaders obsessed with details of purity and power. Jesus looks on the people with compassion/pity they are

indeed like sheep without a shepherd – sheep that know not where to find their pasture. What an interesting detail they sit down on grass – it must be spring a time of new life and growth – later in the year it will be brown and hardly worthy of the word grass. The time of Passover is spring time a time of new life. It is no accident our Easter takes place such a time of new life – Jesus is the Passover lamb he is the food of life and not just the belly – he will lead from the cross to new pasture and life. But this will not be in the minds of the crowds nor of the disciples – but it is in the mind of Matthew as he recalls what happened and writes.

They've got money let them go and buy food – no Jesus wants to give them something that cannot be bought – not yet himself but certainly his love; unconditional and without price. It is a miracle and a sign – but one that always begs questions and so it should.

We must not take from it that the purpose is to demonstrate Jesus's supernatural power – an ability to solve the World's problems with a wave of the hand. It is not magic that changes the heart and soul but the mystery of love – Gods love. This miracle is a sign of life and of growth not reversion to being fed like an infant – the people are called to do something. Note the instruction to the disciples who simply want them to go off and get food – No Jesus says – you feed them. See what can be done with so little. Like yeast in the flour – a great deal can come of acts of love, sharing and kindness. We have been witnesses to that – it is not just food for the calorie count but a lifting of spirit and soul.

Yes the Herods, the henchmen, the Roman and religious overlords are all ripe for change and renewal - *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be satisfied*, but everything starts with the self, the soul. Applying all this to our own time and world, of our own Herods and evil empires, will require searching our own souls first. We must hunger for the right things first and then Christ will show us how we might be satisfied. Then we may offer what we have, our equivalent of a little bread and fish and allowing God in Christ to take it bless it brake it and share it – not just that we may be satisfied but likewise our communities and world.

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