

Eighth Sunday after Trinity

Collect: Almighty God, we beseech you to direct, sanctify and govern both our hearts and bodies in the ways of your laws and the works of your commandments; that through your most mighty protection, both here and ever, we may be preserved in body and soul; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Isaiah 55.1–5: Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. ² 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. ³ Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. ⁴ See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. ⁵ See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

Matthew 14.13–21: Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴ When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. ¹⁵ When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, ‘This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.’

¹⁶ Jesus said to them, ‘They need not go away; you give them something to eat.’ ¹⁷ They replied, ‘We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.’ ¹⁸ And he said, ‘Bring them here to me.’ ¹⁹ Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. ²⁰ And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. ²¹ And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Reflection: Feeding a large crowd does not, on at least 2 occasions, seemed to have been a challenge for Jesus. Unlike some of the challenges for us today in our planning for distributing the sacrament of Communion amidst the restrictions we are living with.

For those present in our churches for services in the coming weeks the arrangement for distributing the bread will be explained so that those who can receive it will have been instructed that receiving communion in one kind offers the fullness of the sacrament and also that in consecrating and distributing the sacrament safety procedures have been observed by the celebrant. And online we are encouraged by the Church to make of this a Spiritual Communion for our sharing in the Communion of Jesus Christ and receiving his grace.

All of this might seem a far cry from the informal way that the disciples shared the bread and fish amongst the large crowd and made arrangements for all that was left over. But in reality, the intention of Jesus to feed those who were hungry and to rally his disciples to undertake this task with him remains true for us today. And also the invitation for us to make sacred all the times when we eat, whether alone or with others. In John's Gospel we remember the resurrection appearance of Jesus meeting his friends early in the morning when he barbecued fish. I think the disciples then understood more than ever the meaning of their call to gather God's people together, to be fishers of people and to know that all the hungry must be fed.

For the prophet Isaiah, the passage today also reflects the perception that he had grasped of God's love bringing something out of nothing. God being revealed, either as mysteriously passing by or being just outside our experience but nevertheless able to transform the everyday. The prophet conveys this as being found in the hustle and bustle of a marketplace where the things essential to daily life can be found. Food, produce, clothing. And if his enthusiasm for rich food is no longer understood to be best for us, his intention is to encourage people to celebrate fully what God provides, not to take these things for granted and to share these things generously with others. And these others must include those who have least, those who are left behind and in our contemporary world those whose very existence has been threatened through war, famine and the effects of climate change.

We may find that some of the phrases used in Matthew's Gospel are jolting to our contemporary minds. The use of exaggeration to make an important point that comes from a prophetic tradition of the time. And Matthew's lack of reference to the lives of women and children, not identifying the number of either of these groups present in the large crowd. And in last week's reading we remember how he commended women for their baking and then upheld the man as the master of the house!

Despite these cultural and historic differences, we can still get the point about the breaking in of God's kingdom when and where God's people make a difference by valuing what they have, by sharing what they have and by welcoming friend and stranger. We can also understand how in the wrong hands these phrases can and have been used to make some people fearful and undervalued or others to thoughtlessly seek to dominate and undermine.

The voice of women and the young as well as other groups has too often been unheard and ignored in Christian communities. We remember that in John's Gospel, in his version of today's Gospel reading, it is the lunch box of a small boy, probably prepared by his mother, sister or grandmother, that helps to save the day.