



Sunday Reflection

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 28 July 2024

Pentecost 10

We consider how God works with us and with whatever we are willing to bring, to sustain, create and change.

"There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish." John 6:9

An illustration to set the scene

TV presenter and academic Professor Alice Roberts tweeted in March 2023, **"I'm so busy writing about the Plague of Cyprian, I forget to eat. Luckily my husband is wonderful!"**

Underneath was a picture of a delicious-looking sandwich and a cup of coffee.

There comes a time in a baby's life when food is no longer the only thing they are interested in.

The world around has become fascinating, with so much to learn, that eating is no longer the centre of their life.

Even as adults it's true that being busy and distracted can make you forget about being hungry, or temporarily suppress appetite, as Alice Roberts found.

Another reason is stress.

If you're being chased by a bear, you're unlikely to feel like stopping for a snack.

Today's Gospel teaching

The crowds in today's Gospel story were so engrossed in what Jesus had to say and in the miracles he was performing that they had followed him a long distance – to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.

Assuming they were crossing from east to west, that's seven miles across, and since they must have walked around the edge, presumably they walked a lot further.

That's a very long way to walk without taking anything to eat or making any plans for where you might find something.

Jesus clearly had superstar status and the crowds were so distracted by him that they either thought following him was more important than making sure they had food, or they completely forgot about the need to eat.

Jesus, though, recognises he needs to do something about the situation or he will be faced with a large crowd of people who are too weak to get home.

It's hard to imagine a modern-day superstar making arrangements to feed the crowds at a concert.

It would be their responsibility to bring their own food or to plan where to buy it.

Today, such a crowd would be a business opportunity, but nobody saw it like that in first-century Galilee.

Jesus could have decided it wasn't his responsibility.

As we see later, he and his disciples could simply have got into the boat and left them all to it.

But he didn't.

This was an opportunity to show that God not only cares enough to perform healing miracles, but is also concerned that people's everyday needs are met.

While healing relies simply on the faith of the person who is healed, this feeding miracle involves using the resources of a member of the crowd – the boy with five loaves and two fish.

How can we apply the teaching to our own lives?

The lesson from this feeding of the five thousand is twofold.

First, if we follow Jesus, enthralled by what he can teach us, wanting to hang on to his every word, and willing to do whatever it is he asks of us, he will honour our commitment by attending to practicalities.

We may not find tiny amounts of food feeding huge crowds, but if we do what God asks of us, things do have a way of working themselves out.

The second lesson is that we are co-creators with God. Jesus worked with what was available.

The boy had some food and was willing to donate it.

When we are prepared to give, however little we have, God can work with it to do greater, often unexpected things.

Neither the disciples nor the boy could have imagined that such a small amount could feed such a large crowd.

If any in the crowd were beginning to feel hungry, they may have been despairing about finding something to eat.

Of course, as Jews, they would have recognised the similarity with the story of Elisha feeding a hundred people with twenty loaves in our alternative Old Testament reading for today that we heard three years ago in track 2.

2 Kings 4.42–44

42 A man came bringing food from the first fruits to Elisha, the man of God: twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. Elisha said, 'Give it to the people and let them eat.'

43 But his servant said, 'How can I set this before a hundred people?' So he repeated, 'Give it to the people and let them eat, for thus says the LORD, "They shall eat and have some left."'

44 He set it before them, they ate, and had some left, according to the word of the LORD.

It demonstrated to them that, like Elisha, Jesus is at the very least a genuine prophet.

As Christians we believe he is much more than that.

We have heard this story so often that it becomes familiar and perhaps unremarkable, but if we can transport ourselves back to the first century and imagine being one of the crowd, we can learn again the lesson of the story and be inspired by what God will achieve if we are willing to work as co-creators.

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