

# St. Margaret's Uniting Church, Mooroolbark

## Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> August, 2017 - Holy Communion

GOSPEL READING Matthew 14:13-21 *Feeding the Five Thousand*

### REFLECTION ON THE SCRIPTURES

Life is relentless. Need is everywhere. Crowds follow, for people are sick and hungry. Even when Jesus feels like there is nothing left in him, in the love of God he is moved to compassion and yet brings life to others.

There is a hard learning in this story for good disciples. But there is also good news for needy crowds, and good disciples have needs just like anyone else.

As we have extended our reflection on Holy Communion today, so at its heart this story is eucharistic. As we hang close to Jesus, he draws us and invites us to trust. In a world of scraps and struggle, Jesus feeds us with God's abundance. And twelve baskets of leftovers are testament to that.

Life is relentless, need is everywhere, and the crowds seem to be bigger than ever in our day. They are bigger because we hear too much of human need – of Syria and the flood of refugees into places like Germany; of deals struck between a reluctant President and a Prime Minister intent on stopping boats; of the growing problems in Manus Island and places like it; of Aboriginal people calling for a treaty; of homeless people in our neighbourhood; of kids in our schools needing reliable adults in their lives...

As someone who feels like a disciple in the story, I'm relieved when Jesus wants to just get away. And when the day is done, I feel again like sending them away to fend for themselves.

But we cannot escape the noise much like Jesus couldn't. It has a way of following. And when Jesus got out of the boat to be greeted by a crowd of human need, he found a way to be compassionate, and cured those who were sick.

*O Lord, hear my prayer. I am tired of all this noise. I am tired of all this need. Surely these are not all my neighbour! It is going to kill me if they are. And at the end of it, I have nothing I can offer that will make a difference. Please make it go away, so I can enjoy a day off – in green pasture on the lakeside in some heavenly peace!*

While such a prayer may seem irreverent, I am sure that it is heard. Actually, it seems to be the point of this story, and the heart of our worship today. But we will get to that in a moment.

The disciples seem tired, overwhelmed, and fearful there is not enough. I know this fear. I have an overactive fear of not being good enough, or skilled enough. I feel like many that what I have to offer is not enough. Imagine the ridicule of trying to feed 5000 plus with a meal that belongs to a boy!

I wonder if you share my fear of not having anything worth offering? The Kids' Hope program that people here are involved in is really important. Too many local school kids do not have reliable adults in their lives. They crave someone who knows them and cares for them, someone who will show up each week for an hour. It is something that changes lives, feeds the hungry, heals the sick. And yet I fear I have nothing to offer a kid, or cannot stick it out week in, week out.

But Jesus says, 'you give them something to eat'!

Jesus calls our bluff. And in return he honours us in the space of our fears and creates far more with our meagre crumbs than we could ever imagine.

Just ask those who are currently mentoring through Kids' Hope!

And just ask about the Stable One homeless shelter that is happening in our area this winter.

There is so much I could say about this, and please ask me if you want to know more. But the first night of winter, James was given a bed through Stable One. Before this he had been sleeping rough in his car after a relationship break up. James was anxious, unemployed, and highly medicated to calm his fears.

Over the weeks things changed. He became less stressed and was now getting decent sleep, and so his medication was reduced. He found a part time job and did well enough for it to become full time. He found a place to stay in someone's back yard, and now he is volunteering for Stable One, helping people like him.

*Taking the five loaves and the two fish, Jesus looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the*

*disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.*

Jesus takes us when we are overwhelmed, tired, and feel we have nothing worth offering. Jesus takes us in the middle of our fears and helps us amid them. And he pushes us beyond them. You feed them!

All it takes is a scrap or crumb from us. The nothing we have, Jesus can use. The nothing we come to the table with, is transformed in our encounter with the living Christ, until all are blessed with the bread of life.

I don't need to fear being a Kids' Hope mentor. I don't need to fear I have little worth giving to Stable One, or as a minister in this place. For Christ meets us at the table, to feed our hunger, and quench our thirst.

I have often wondered about a quote from Marianne Williamson, and thought it was somehow ridiculous or missed the mark. It begins:

*Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.*

I rejected this idea because I do not feel powerful, rather as I have shared, inadequacy seems closer to the truth. But then I realised that my view or lens on this was also inadequate. For she continues:

*You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world... We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us.... As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.*

So the crowd is healed from sickness, and it is fed. The disciples are lifted from their sense of inadequacy, are fed and become part of feeding the crowd. And children at Kilsyth Primary School are liberated through the gentle care and support of adults here among us. And people like James find house, home, place and belonging, and become a symbol of twelve baskets of abundance - a new wave of eucharistic love given for the sake of the world.

If you are drawn here because in some way you feel sick; if you find yourself here because of a deep hunger in your soul; if feel you are empty, with nothing worth offering, then come.

You don't need much more than a basic trust that God is good and Jesus reveals grace and love to us. We come with empty hands, and often hearts that are full of wrong things. And yet, like the disciples, this is the place where God transforms and renews us in the bread of life and the cup of blessing.

Here Christ meets us. And calls us God's own.

rejected and pursued by Jennie Gordon

*Matthew 14:13-21*

rejected and pursued  
you, who yearned for solitude  
and found a crowd  
you, who sought the barren place  
to pour your grief and hide your face  
you drew them out  
and still they come  
with deepest hunger  
and we don't know  
how to feed them  
we despair at what we're holding  
fearing that it isn't worthy  
subscribing to the rumour  
that it's best to go and buy it  
from a market where there's plenty  
rather than our meagre offering...  
  
and you stop us in our panic  
seat the hungry,  
take our labours...  
  
when misery meets mercy  
compassion's bread is broken  
hurt transforms to healing  
death becomes redundant  
and abundant blooms  
the feast  
within the desert of release