

## A Proper 13

Place: Isaiah 55.1-5

Theme: The Abundance of God Matt 14.13-21

- ◆ It is difficult to make sense of today's miracle of feeding in the face of the stories of famine and economic gloom in the news. Anxiety about having enough even afflicts us here in leafy Wimbledon.
- ◆ Christians often approach this story wondering how it could possibly happen and worrying about the mechanics of the story. The question we need to ask of the story is not how did Jesus do it, but what does it tell us about being a disciple of Christ?
- ◆ To answer this question we need to begin by thinking about the themes scarcity and abundance running through the Bible; starting from the very beginning.
- ◆ There is a long tradition of God feeding his people which begins with the second account of creation in Genesis. God creates the Garden of Eden and tells Adam that he 'may eat freely of every tree of the garden' .... Except one. When Adam and Eve break God's command they are cast out of the Garden and the abundance of God's provision in the Garden is replaced with the scarcity of the wilderness to which they are banished . Now the ground is cursed to them, they must toil if they will eat and the ground will bring

forth thorns and thistles. The final curse is that of mortality, God says ‘By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground for out of it you were taken; you that are dust.’ When human beings fall from the state of grace we are reduced to our base elements, to dust.

- ◆ The journey of salvation, as it unfolds through the Bible, can be seen as a return to the original abundance of creation, as much as to a promise to restore eternal life. We celebrate the Resurrection each Sunday by sharing bread and wine together and getting a foretaste of the heavenly banquet that awaits us.
- ◆ Throughout the scriptures we are encouraged to see that God feeds his people. The first sign of this comes when God frees his people from slavery in Egypt. God brings them through the dessert to the promised land, a land flowing with milk and honey.
- ◆ This journey holds a paradox at its heart. While the Bible tells us that the people ate the bread of affliction in Egypt, as God leads them through the wilderness the regularly complain about the food in the desert. They reminisce in longing tones about the melons and cucumbers, the delicious fish they enjoyed in Egypt. In the midst of the desert however, they discover God’s abundance and

generosity to them. Each is able to collect the manna they need for the day, but no more. A huge flock of quails descend on them and they feast on roasted meat. They gradually begin to recognise the abundant generosity of God in the midst of the wilderness; they start to learn our absolute dependence on God.

- ◆ Isaiah in our first reading links the restoration of God's reign with a return to the abundance of creation and God feeding his people. In Isaiah's prophecy God invites the people to return to him and discover that in him their deepest wants are met. The poor being fed is an important symbol of God's reign in the prophets and throughout the scriptures.
- ◆ The gospel writers are very aware of this and so the feeding miracles feature in all four Gospels. Matthew and Mark have two different feeding miracles within a couple of chapters of each other. It seems that the disciples found it hard to grasp the message so that it needed to be repeated. It will always be the same. One of the hardest things for us to accept about the Gospel is that we need to radically change the way we see ourselves in the world. We need to stop seeing ourselves in terms of what we do not have and start to recognise what we can offer instead. It was true for the disciples, it is true for us now.

- ◆ In the Gospel reading when Jesus asks the disciples 'Where are we to buy bread for all these people to eat?' all the disciples can see is the overwhelming need; the vast, hungry crowd. They are so overwhelmed by the need, they are unable to do anything.
- ◆ The child who offers the bread and fishes represents the trusting, faithful side of the disciples. The part that can turn to Jesus when things are difficult rather than thinking they have to do it on their own. It is a very small act of faith, Andrew says that the boy is there, but follows it up by saying, but that won't be enough. That small crumb of faith is enough for Jesus. He takes it and turns it into an abundance sufficient to feed everyone there with 12 baskets left over.
- ◆ When we face overwhelming challenges as disciples and feel inadequate to the task we have been set we need to look for the faithful child within us and act generously with the little we have, trusting God in Jesus Christ to do the rest. God's abundance is revealed through our willingness to trust and be generous. Jesus calls us from the wilderness of want to his abundant kingdom.