

Eighth Sunday after Trinity

FEEDING THE HUNGRY

INVOCATION

+ In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen

The Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.
We lift up our hearts in thanks and praise:
Glory to you, O God!

PRAISE

Alleluia! Sing to Jesus!
His the sceptre, his the throne;
Alleluia! His the triumph,
His the victory alone.
Hark! The songs of peaceful Zion
Thunder like a mighty flood.
Jesus, out of every nation,
Has redeemed us by his blood.

Alleluia! Not as orphans
Are we left in sorrow now;
Alleluia! He is near us;
Faith believes nor questions how.
Though the cloud from sight received him
When the forty days were o'er,
Shall our hearts forget his promise,
'I am with you evermore'?

Alleluia! bread of angels,
here on earth our food, our stay;
alleluia, here the sinful
come to you from day to day.
Intercessor, friend of sinners,

earth's redeemer, plead for me,
where the songs of all the sinless
sweep across the crystal sea.

Alleluia, king eternal,
he the Lord of lords we own;
alleluia, born of Mary,
earth his footstool, heaven his throne;
he within the veil has entered
robed in flesh, our great high priest;
he on earth both priest and victim
in the Eucharistic feast.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.

As we come before God asking him to cleanse our hearts that we may worship and follow him in Spirit and in truth. In a time of silence reflect on your life in the last week, asking God to amend what is wrong, and to affirm what is good.

Then say:

You were sent to heal the contrite:
Father, have mercy.

You came to call sinners:
Christ, have mercy.

You plead for us at the right hand of the Father:
Holy Spirit, have mercy.

Almighty God have mercy upon me,
forgive me my sins,
and keep me in eternal life. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE DAY

Lord God,
your Son left the riches of heaven
and became poor for our sake:
when we prosper save us from pride,
when we are needy save us from despair
that we may trust in you alone;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

READINGS

Read: Isaiah 55.1-5

Verses from Psalm 145

The LORD is kind and full of compassion,
slow to anger, abounding in mercy.
All your works shall thank you, O LORD,
and all your faithful ones bless you.

The eyes of all look to you,
and you give them their food in due season.
You open your hand and satisfy
the desire of every living thing.

The LORD is just in all his ways,
and holy in all his deeds.

The LORD is close to all who call him,
who call on him in truth.

He fulfils the desires of those who fear him;
he hears their cry and he saves them.

Let my mouth speak the praise of the LORD;
let all flesh bless his holy name
forever, for ages unending. Amen.

ALLELUIA

Alleluia, alleluia!
You shall love the Lord with all your heart
and with all your soul
and with all your mind
and with all your strength.
Alleluia!

Read: MATTHEW 14.13-21

REFLECTION

The feeding of the five thousand is one of the stories that features in all four Gospels, and the fact that all four evangelists chose to record it shows that it is of considerable significance. It is foreshadowed in various prophetic passages that use the symbolism of a meal to speak of God's love and care for his people, as in the first reading from Isaiah.

Feeding five thousand people from just a few loaves and fishes is an astonishing event. So much so, that various attempts have been made to rationalise it. It has been suggested that the willingness of a few to give away their food prompted others to match their generosity and share the food that they had in fact brought with them but had kept concealed. Others have suggested that the numbers involved were exaggerated, or that each only received a

token amount of food, or that the story is not meant to be taken literally, but is a symbolic picture of how Christ feeds his people.

How do we understand events outside our experience like storms being calmed, madmen being cured, pigs rushing into a lake, people being raised from the dead, and thousands being fed from a few loaves and fishes? The temptation is to rationalise the stories, or to treat them as a purely symbolic. The problem is that there is no evidence that Matthew (and the other evangelists) saw these as purely symbolic stories, and if they were, why would they have bothered to record them? Miracles were not a new phenomenon – there are stories about rabbis altering the weather as well as curing the sick – and miracle cures are known in our own day. Matthew and the other evangelists record them to open our eyes to the truth about Jesus, and there would have been little point in doing so if the events recorded had not taken place. It is significant that the original Greek of the New Testament does not use the equivalent word for ‘miracle’ – which means merely a marvellous thing, something to be wondered at – instead they are described as ‘acts of power’, or a ‘sign’ (John’s preferred term). What we call a miracle is a sign pointing to a truth beyond the actual event. The point is put well by C.F.D. Moule in his commentary on St Mark’s Gospel:

It seems that, wherever Jesus went, surprising things did happen. But the importance of them lay not in their marvellous quality: they were not, like conjuring tricks, merely astonishing; nor were they ever done merely in order to surprise. They always seem to have been the result, simply, of his concern for people and his perfect and absolute obedience, as Son of God, to the will of his Father. We assume quite correctly, that there is a regularity and consistency about nature, and that effect can always be relied upon to follow cause... What we forget is that we have never ourselves witnessed a situation in which persons needing help are reached by a man perfectly in

line with God's will... Might it not be that what we call a miracle would be the natural and inevitable effect, given such a cause, and given also enough faith – trust in God – on the part of the other persons concerned? That is why these miracles are called acts of power: they are natural phenomena, whenever the power of God is let through by obedience and concern for persons and by a readiness to trust God.

(C.F.D. Moule, *The Gospel According to St Mark*, pp. 15-16)

Not even Jesus was able to work miracles in all situations. Where the personal relationship and the response of faith is lacking he cannot *impose* the will of God. But when these things are present, and men and women put themselves at the disposal of God, then very striking things happen. Where God's sovereignty is really acknowledged lives are made whole and evil is overcome. When Jesus walked over the lake to the disciples they were terrified, thinking it was a ghost, and Mark comments on their response: 'they had not understood the incident of the loaves; their minds were closed.' The disciples had not seen beyond the wonder of the miracle to the truth to which it pointed.

These stories challenge our modern way of thinking and raise some difficult questions about the way we understand scripture. They also offer a profound assurance about the power of God in Christ. These two things pull against one another, for the assurance would not be true if the stories were false or simply symbolic. When faced with a Biblical event wholly beyond our experience the path of wisdom is not credulity, nor rejection; rather we should hold it together with our modern scientific knowledge and let the tension between them draw us forward into God's greater truth. As you reflect today try to let this tension draw you forward into a deeper experience of the power of God.

Pause and reflect.

RESPONSE

In the Lord I'll be ever thankful,
in the Lord, I will rejoice!
Look to God, do not be afraid;
lift up your voices: the Lord is near,
lift up your voices: the Lord is near.

PRAYERS

A time of free prayer and intercession. You might like to use this five-fold pattern:

For the Church
For the World
For family, friends, neighbours and the local community
For the sick and all in need, near and far
For those who have died

At the end:

Merciful Father, accept my prayers,
for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.
Amen.

CONCLUSION

Our Father...

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
The love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all, now and for ever. Amen.