

**Dorset South and West Circuit**  
**Service for Sunday 25 July 2021 by Revd Gwyneth Owen**

**Bible readings**

2 Kings 4:42-44; John 6:1-21

Take a moment to centre yourself in God's presence and be open to God.

**Hymn:** Try singing to Hyfrydol (I will sing the wondrous story.)

God is Love: let heaven adore him; God is Love: let earth rejoice;  
let creation sing before him, and exalt him with one voice.  
He who laid the earth's foundation, he who spread the heavens above,  
he who breathes through all creation, he is Love, eternal Love.

God is Love: and he enfoldeth all the world in one embrace;  
with unfailing grasp he holdeth every child of every race.  
And when human hearts are breaking under sorrow's iron rod,  
then they find that selfsame aching deep within the heart of God.

God is Love: and though with blindness sin afflicts each human soul  
God's eternal loving-kindness holds and guides and keeps them whole.  
Sin and death and hell shall never o'er us final triumph gain;  
God is Love, so Love for ever o'er the universe must reign.

Timothy Rees 1874-1939

**Let us pray,**

Gracious God of love, the God of this universe and of universes beyond, human beings have always been drawn to worship you. And that includes me, sitting in my home, using the words of this service to help me sense your presence, be reminded of the wonder of your being and prompted to offer my thanks and praise.

I join my praise with others using these words as together we celebrate your love for us and your understanding of us.

We praise you for Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life, who is able to make our crumbs of faith go a long way and who nourishes us as his followers.

We praise you for your Holy Spirit who works quietly in our lives and nudges us to be open to you and to the needs of others.

We praise you that you understand our faith and our lack of faith; our hopes and our fears; our achievements and our failures. In your loving understanding you forgive us, encourage us and inspire us to follow more closely the Christ who is always calling us.

Creator, Christ, Spirit of three-fold love, we praise you. Amen

**Reading 2 Kings 4:42-44**

<sup>42</sup> A man came from Baal-shalishah, bringing food from the first fruits to 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.”<sup>43</sup> 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.’”<sup>44</sup> He set it before them, they ate, and had some left, according to the word of the Lord.

### **Reading John 6:1-15**

**6** After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias.<sup>[a]</sup> **2** A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. **3** Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. **4** Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. **5** When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?” **6** He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. **7** Philip answered him, “Six months’ wages<sup>[b]</sup> would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” **8** One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, **9** “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?” **10** Jesus said, “Make the people sit down.” Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they<sup>[c]</sup> sat down, about five thousand in all. **11** Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. **12** When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, “Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.” **13** So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. **14** When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, “This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.” **15** When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

**16** When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, **17** got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. **18** The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. **19** When they had rowed about three or four miles,<sup>[d]</sup> they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. **20** But he said to them, “It is I;<sup>[e]</sup> do not be afraid.” **21** Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.

### **Reflection**

I think the theme from our 2 Bible readings today is very clear: food is fed to the hungry in surprising ways. These accounts are separated by around 900 years, but whether you came from Baal-Shalishah (postcode unknown) or the shores of the Sea of Galilee (postcode more readily available) the outcome was the same – you were fed from very meagre supplies.

On one level, the message is abundantly clear: Elisha, God’s prophet, was used by God to feed the hungry, and Jesus (described in John 6:14 as, “the prophet who is to come into the world”) was used by God to feed 50x the number Elisha had fed, again from meagre supplies.

As I said, on one level the meaning is clear: both were used by God to feed the hungry from bits and pieces. The thing is, one level of understanding scripture is rarely sufficient. Like peeling an onion there’s usually more to discover. Let’s

leave Elisha with his 100 folk to feed and focus on Jesus who has 5,000 + to deal with.

You will have heard it said many times that the feeding of the 5,000 is the only miracle that occurs in all 4 gospels. However, in John, its setting is very different from that of Matthew, Mark and Luke. We need to pay attention to this setting if we are to unpeel a little more of its message.

Verse 3: Jesus is up a mountain. Verse 4: it was nearly time for the Passover Feast. Only John tells us this detail. Why? Mountains and Passover would point to one person for those first hearers of this account– Moses. Moses the great law giver, the teacher, the one who led God’s people into freedom and, in partnership with God, ensured they were fed with daily food in the wilderness.

So notice, John is surreptitiously preparing his reader to consider that Jesus is, at the very least, to be mentioned in the same breath as the great Moses. Indeed, he is the NEW Moses. Really? That would keep the early readers of this account on the edge of their seats.

And they were not disappointed. In verse 5 Jesus asks Philip where they might get enough bread from to feed the people, but, niftily, in verse 6 we are told that Jesus already knew what he was going to do (Matt, Mark and Luke don’t tell us this detail). Compare this with the great Moses who asked God: “Where am I to get meat to give to all these people? For they come weeping to me and say, ‘Give us meat to eat!’” (Numbers 11:13). This was not a rhetorical question - Moses didn’t have a clue how he was going to feed everyone. John is making the case, step by step, that Jesus is greater than the great Moses.

And John takes one more step to build his case. You will notice that our set reading ends with Jesus walking on water to the disciples who are battling against a storm. Walking on water? Moses, great as he was, as close to God as he was, as instrumental in bringing God’s people to freedom as he was, had to walk *through* the waters of the Sea of Reeds – not *on* them.

You see, in John’s Gospel, as we unpeel the onion, so to speak, this passage is less about food and more about giving answers to the question: who is Jesus? One climax comes when the people are fed, to be sure. But I think in John’s hands the main climax is in verse 20, which translates more accurately, “I AM; don’t be afraid”.

Step by step John has led his first readers and now, you and me, to the startling claim that Jesus is greater than the great Moses: he is none other than, I AM. He uses God’s name -he is God. Pause to think what that would have sounded like in the ears of the first hearers/readers of John’s Gospel. Pause, too, to reflect on what it means for you.

As for the feeding. Well, it’s nearly time for me to end and for you to put the kettle on! But, in my own spirituality, this account is about miracle not magic. The early church saw this miracle as being a precursor to Holy Communion. In the feeding of 5,000 Jesus TOOK bread, GAVE THANKS, BROKE it and GAVE it.... Whatever communion liturgy you hear in church, you should hear and see these words/actions. On one level, sharing Holy Communion reminds us that there is enough to go around – as at the feeding of 5,000 - so that there’s a place for all at

God's table – as the new President of the Methodist Conference has reminded us in her Conference address.

On the same theme....why would one boy pack his lunch but no one else in that crowd think to do the same? Might the miracle be that there was enough because the crowd, instead of seeing each other as just part of a crowd, were enabled by Jesus to see each other as a neighbour in need. So they shared!

- Who is Jesus in your life? Has John persuaded you to think more deeply about this?
- Pay attention to what's happening in the liturgy at your next Holy Communion and what it symbolises
- Are you able to see in the crowd of need those who are your neighbour? And how are you called to respond?

### **Prayers for others**

I am writing this on 5 July 2021, so by the time you read it, the world and specific situations of need will have moved on. Pray for:

- People and situations in the news over the last few days: human tragedies; political tensions; injustices.
- Those who feed others: multi-government international aid – that it goes to where it is most needed; those who teach others improved agricultural methods so that there may be better harvests; Foodbanks, lunch clubs, hospitable friends who offer food for the body and the soul.
- This circuit and its churches: for staff and church leaders. Pray especially for those planning house groups/discussion groups in the autumn that aim to help us understand more about who Jesus is for us in our daily living.
- You and your loved ones: take time to name the people for whom you have promised to pray. Take time to pray that God's Spirit will sift the words of this service so that you settle with what is needful for you today.

The Lord hears our prayer: Thanks be to God.

### **The Lord's Prayer.**

### **Hymn**

Lord, dismiss us with your blessing; fill our hearts with joy and peace;  
let us each, your love possessing, triumph in redeeming grace.  
O refresh us, O refresh us, travelling through this wilderness.

Thanks we give and adoration for your gospel's joyful sound:  
may the fruits of your salvation in our hearts and lives abound:  
ever faithful, ever faithful to the truth may we be found.

John Fawcett 1740-1817

### **Blessing**

Creator, Christ, Spirit of three-fold love gift us with your blessing, we pray, today and always. Amen.