

3 August sermon 'You give them something to eat!'  
Matthew 14:13-21

Last Sunday's Birthday lunch was amazing! Thank you to all who brought food to share. Some of you were especially generous, so all were able to enjoy enough. Thank you, and thank you to those who served, and did the washing up. Thank you to all who were there to share in the celebration.

In our gospel reading, too there is plenty of food, more than enough, eventually! And like last weekend, plenty left over! Jesus has just heard of his cousin John's death. He leaves to go to a deserted place to grieve and to pray, but the crowds follow him. His response is not to send them away, his response is healing, compassion, feeding. The Gospel reading certainly shows God's overwhelming care and generosity.

William Loader asks:

'Was there an actual feeding, an actual miracle? The tradition says there was. It makes a link with the Elijah/Elisha stories. (2 Kings 4:42-44) Some may say we cannot really know what happened, as a good way of avoiding the embarrassment that such magic is in the story which we could do with urgently in areas of need. Unrepeatable wonders like this are a tease to poverty and destitution.

Others suggest the authors never meant the story literally or just left out the bit about everyone opening their own lunches and sharing. In principle the miracle is defensible philosophically. Random realities are fashionable in scientific reflection these days. . . Not everyone will believe the story literally. I really wish it were something we could still do!

Certainly the meal is invested with symbolic associations. It foreshadows the great feast when all nations will gather in peace and reconciliation (Isa 25). Inevitably hearers then and now make connections with other meals in Jesus' ministry and his regular use of meal imagery (e.g., the parable of the great feast, killing the fatted calf, etc). We naturally think of the eucharist. Just before this episode Matthew ... had recounted the black eucharist of Herod Antipas where John the Baptist's head was presented on a platter. Matthew has John's disciples come and tell Jesus of the execution. Jesus' departure by boat to a lonely spot is seen as a direct response to John's execution, which, for Matthew, is one of a piece with the disciples and Jesus. The feeding, in that sense, is like a requiem mass for John, a comfort for Jesus and his disciples at John's death. Maybe'. Loader

<http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/MtPentecost8.htm>

'You feed them' Jesus said. What does that mean for us? In our world of poverty and strife. 'You feed them'.

We can pray and that really makes a difference.

We can put money on the plate and that makes a difference.

We can write to people on Manus Island and other detention centres, and prisons, and politicians. That too makes a difference.

How can you, how can we express that compassion and overwhelming generosity that Jesus/God models?

What does it mean for you, for me?

Doesn't it mean, to open my lunchbox, my wallet, my heart, to those who are hungry, those who are physically hungry and those who are spiritually hungry? Those two things often go together.

Today, the situation in Gaza is overwhelming me. And yet Jesus says 'you give them something to eat'. You feed and clothe and love and heal the Israelis. You feed and clothe and love and heal the Palestinians.

They are all my people.

Weep with me. Lament with me. Feed my sheep.

The prayer in St Georges Cathedral Jerusalem, written by a Palestinian Christian, that Anne Ranse shares, reads:

*Pray not for Arab or Jew, for Palestinian or Israeli, but pray rather for ourselves, that we might not divide them in our prayers but keep them both together in our hearts.*

*Grace and peace from the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Katherine Rainger has provided stories for you to read from an Israeli mother, and a Palestinian woman, and our own Anne Ranse, as well as info on the ABM supported hospital we invite you to support.

Israeli mother, Josie Glausiusz 23/07/14 writes:

Humans of Gaza, Humans of Tel Aviv. I do not want my children to grow up to kill or be killed in a senseless war that has no end.

..I have no respect for religious extremists of any stripe, and certainly not for Hamas...But as Sari Bashi, founder and former executive director of Gisha, the Legal Center for Freedom of Movement, said in an interview last week, "Gaza is not Hamas."

We would do well to remember that. I want to remember that people in Gaza are human, just like me (an Israeli woman) and my family. If I forget that, then I've lost part of my own humanity. I also know that the military solution is no solution, and that it will only lead to more bloodshed and hatred and war; and that the only way of ending this conflict is through a negotiated peace

settlement with the Palestinians. The alternative is a bloody repeat of the same battle two years or five years or ten years hence: the periodic “mowing the lawn,” otherwise known as “flatten all of Gaza” in the words of Ariel Sharon’s son Gilad Sharon.

In my mind’s eye, I keep seeing myself running through the street with my children, the siren wailing, the children laughing, the crash, the children screaming. I know there are mothers in Gaza doing the same, and they are not so different from me, and that they probably have nowhere to go for shelter. I want to believe in the words of that Nurit Hirsch song, that “children on vacation will play tag between the house and the fields” and that there can be peace and equality and human rights and respect for both Israelis and Palestinians wherever they are. Because I do not want my children to grow up to kill or be killed in a senseless war that has no end'.

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Palestinian woman living in Gaza, Lena Khalaf Tuffaha reflects:(*Running Orders*)

They call us now.  
Before they drop the bombs.  
The phone rings  
and someone who knows my first name  
calls and says in perfect Arabic,  
“This is David.”...And in my stupor of sonic booms and glass shattering  
symphonies still smashing around in my head I think "Do I know any Davids  
in Gaza?"  
They call us now to say "Run.You have 58 seconds from the end of this  
message.Your house is next".

They think of it as some kind of war time courtesy. It doesn’t matter that there is nowhere to run to. It means nothing that the borders are closed and your papers are worthless and mark you only for a life sentence in this prison by the sea and the alleyways are narrow and there are more human lives packed one against the other more than any other place on earth.

Just run. We aren’t trying to kill you. It doesn’t matter that you can’t call us back to tell us the people we claim to want aren’t in your house that there’s no one here except you and your children who were cheering for Argentina, sharing the last loaf of bread for this week, counting candles left in case the power goes out.

It doesn't matter that you have children. You live in the wrong place and now is your chance to run to nowhere. It doesn't matter that 58 seconds isn't long enough to find your wedding album or your son's favourite blanket or your daughter's almost completed college application or your shoes or to gather everyone in the house. It doesn't matter what you had planned. It doesn't matter who you are. Prove you're human. Prove you stand on two legs. Run.'

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This is vivid scary stuff and a poignant reflection from two ordinary human beings.

Brian McGowan, Anglican priest in Western Australia writes:

'Where God is, where Jesus is, there is compassion. Never an abstract quality. Always God's love actually doing something for somebody. Doing something about their plight. Not just talking about it...

We often hear the term 'compassion fatigue' used by those at the cutting edge of on-the-ground-help in their search for funds to support them; to describe most of the rest of us. I know what they're saying often applies to me. I don't even give as much financial support as I could (i.e. I apply the old "Here I am, send someone else!" principle!) Deep down I know I need to do something more than just watch disaster succeed disaster on ever more instant & trivialising TV.

Is there some small, achievable action we can take, preferably in company as the Body of Christ, at our congregational or local level? Surely there must be ways 5 loaves & 2 fishes or their equivalent can still help feed a multitude? Question: Who's going to start it off by handing them over?

Jesus' feeding of the crowd needs to become substance for today's hungry crowds. Debates about how & whether it happened can be a cop out.

How can we as today's Body of Christ play host to the world about us as Jesus does?

Are eucharistic bread & wine only a sad commentary on, a wistful mockery of, a fleeting religious Camelot long ago & far away?

Or are they, are we who share them, demonstrating a commitment to what still can happen when Jesus takes bread, wine, fish, anything, & we as disciples make ourselves available to make sure it goes around?

The Gospels meticulously record that there were left-overs. When God fills, God fills!...

If we can't recognize a good story about God's overwhelming generosity when we see one, maybe we're incapable of recognizing the generosity itself?

And Passing it on to those still waiting for their share?

<http://www.angelfire.com/journal2/matthew0/MIM141321PENT11.html>

Matthew in the Margins, by Brian McGowan, Anglican priest in Western Australia.

17'We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.' 18And he said, 'Bring them here to me.' 19Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. 20And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. 21And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.'

Susanna Pain

3 August 2014

(ABM GAZA EMERGENCY APPEAL - <http://www.abmission.org/gaza>

The Al- Ahli Arab hospital, which was setup and is run by the Anglican/Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem, a Partner of ABM, has been structurally damaged during the airstrikes and its ventilation system in the operating theatre and the emergency room have also now in need of repair. In addition, windows have been broken in many buildings, as well as in the new diagnostic centre.....)