

Sunday 2nd August 2020: Trinity 8 Matthew 14 v13-21

Welcome to Praying Together but Separately

Gathering Before God

Make sure you are sitting comfortably.

I am in the presence of the Living God, Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayer of 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

Reflection

Breathe slowly and deeply.

Ask God to speak to you through the passage that you are about to read.

Bible Reading: Matthew 14 v13-21

Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, ‘This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.’ Jesus said to them, ‘They need not go away; you give them something to eat.’ They replied, ‘We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.’ And he said, ‘Bring them here to me.’ Then 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. 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.

*Read through the passage once. Read it quietly out loud but say each word out loud. Try and take note of any words or phrases that strike you.*

*Say that word or phrase quietly out loud or underline it with a pen.*

*Read the passage a second time.*

*As you read, think about how the word or phrase you notice might speak to you today. After you have read the passage again, sit in silence and try and come up with a sentence or two that sums up what you think the word or phrase means for you today.*

*Read the passage a third time and prayerfully think about what Christ has said to you.*

Some thoughts for Further Reflection:

It may feel like an odd time to be reflecting on the abundance of God and the miracle of the feeding of the 5000 men plus women and children. It sits as an odd counter point to our current lives which are full of constraint, guidance, guidelines, cancelled events, frustrations, and deep anxiety for the future; as well as the profound grief we feel for those who we have loved and lost.

And yet, here is Jesus attending to the detail of the crowd’s hunger – attending to their need for food and rest. He knows you can’t listen, learn, grow in your souls when your belly is empty. You cannot fully engage when you are distracted and not at peace. Many of us may not have experienced serious physical hunger, when we are so concerned for our next meal we cannot settle to anything. We have all known the rumbles and pangs when lunch is late or dinner delayed, but the crowd had travelled and followed Jesus all day – their sick had been cured – it had been a long day, they had walked miles and they were pretty hungry and far from home. And Jesus wasn’t finished with them – ‘they need not go away’. He wanted them to stay despite his own tiredness and need for solitude at the start of this story. His compassion was greater, his love wanted to nurture them in body and soul. So 2 fish and 5 loaves were found – someone’s picnic maybe (John’s Gospel has them handed to Jesus by a young boy) and somehow all were fed and all were satisfied. God multiplied the food so there was enough – bellies were full so their hearts could be filled too. Conversations could be had.

The people could spend more time with Jesus and his disciples. And there were left overs – 12 baskets to represent the 12 tribes of Israel. Enough for everyone.

So this miracle of abundance tells us of God’s love, power and compassion. And also God’s practicality – we are human bodies with physical needs and God knows that and shares that with us. Our hunger at this time for contact, hugs, spontaneity, freedom are known by God and understood by God. All the things we have given up to contain the virus are known and seen and heard by God. And God calls us to fullness of life and God shows us that He knows our needs – physical, emotional and spiritual. And God attends to them; God offers us food and rest. Rest in the knowledge of his love. Food in the words of the Bible, the food of God’s saving work and love amongst us in Jesus. Food in the Spirit who nurtures us and empowers us.

We may experience all these things in particular ways. A kind word from a friend, an email or letter encouraging us. We may feel our hearts swell as we pray or sing or take a walk in God’s creation. When we find time to ‘stop and stay a while’ and open ourselves to God perfect presence we can find a deeper rest, and a peaceful restoration of our souls. God knows how hard life is now and how hard it can be for all his children – and he meets us in that and offers us food and love.

Creative Prayer activity for at home

List all the things you have given up in the last 4 months: birthdays, weddings, family gatherings, work, hugs with loved ones etc… List them here or say them aloud. Maybe look through your calendar or diary.

Offer these things to God – the events, the sadness, the frustration. This prayer may be useful:

Loving God you know my needs better than I do myself. Hear me in my frustration, my sadness, and my grief. My losses are painful and hard to bear. Be with me now as I admit them to myself and to you. I pray you will heal my deep wounds and grief and my surface wounds of irritation, lack of patience and annoyance. Help me to grow in compassion for myself and those round about me. I pray that as you fed the crowds you will feed me with your love and your Holy Spirit.

**Amen.**

A prayer concerning the Coronavirus

God of compassion,
be close to those who are ill, afraid or in isolation.
In their loneliness, be their consolation;
in their anxiety, be their hope;
in their darkness, be their light;
through him who suffered alone on the cross,
but reigns with you in glory,
Jesus Christ our Lord.
**Amen.**

An act of spiritual Communion

My Jesus,
I believe that You
are present in the Most Holy Sacrament.
I love You above all things,
and I desire to receive You into my soul.
Since I cannot at this moment
receive You sacramentally,
come at least spiritually into my heart.

I embrace You as if You were already there and unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You.

**Amen.**

The Lord’s Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;**

**thy kingdom come; thy will be done;**

**on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread.**

**And forgive us our trespasses,**

**as we forgive those who trespass against us.**

**And lead us not into temptation;** **but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom,**

**the power and the glory,** **for ever and ever.**

**Amen.**