

**Trinity 8/Proper 12 – 25th July 2021**

Welcome to Praying Together

Hymn Suggestions

[Behold the Lamb (Communion Hymn)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ACHPwx7EGQA)

[Bread of heaven, on Thee we feed](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSNLtZu3CkI)

[Pass Me Not, O Gentle Saviour](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E5bx0H8EDO4)

[I am the bread of life](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IvD0XJzOWQ4)

[Eternal Father, Strong to Save](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bDjwUzUnNpU)

[The Lord’s My Shepherd (Townend)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pN4tPkX0MG0)

[I heard the voice of Jesus say](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yYqgBMrmeZA)

There are a selection of hymns here from St Martin’s in the Field: <https://www.achurchnearyou.com/hub/asset/hymns-and-choral-music>

Preparation

*Today’s service is about bread (it is about much more than that really, but let’s start there). Nowadays we are used to a huge assortment of different breads. You might introduce the them of the service by asking the congregation how many different types of bread they can come up with (rye, sour dough, wholemeal, French stick, ciabatta, ciabatta with sundried tomato and basil, etc.)*

*If you wanted to, and you know you would make use of it at some point after the service, you might purchase some of the loaves that are available as an object lesson. (If you feel brave and want to take it further, buy a jar of pickled herring too and see if you or any of the congregation want to try them!)*

*Tell the congregation that we have so many types of bread and so readily available that it is easy to take this staple food product for granted – but that is not the case in many parts of the world. What else do we have that we take for granted? As you listen to the answers you could write them down. Once you have done this you can lead into the collect for the day.*

Collect - 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.**

Note

As the theme is food, there could be tie-ins with local Food Banks (maybe your own). This might also be an occasion to raise awareness of food waste. For example, explore the facts and figures on Fare Shares website: <https://fareshare.org.uk/what-we-do/hunger-food-waste/> This is both an issue concerning the surplus for some and the insufficiency for others, but also an environmental issue when one considers the amount of CO2 required to produce, package, deliver and temporarily store such food, only for it to go to landfill.

Bible Reading: John 6.1-21

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias.  A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming towards him, Jesus said to Philip, ‘Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?’ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, ‘Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.’ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, ‘There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?’ Jesus said, ‘Make the people sit down.’ Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. 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. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, ‘Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.’ So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. 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.’

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.

When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, got into a boat, and started across the lake to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The lake became rough because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the lake and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. But he said to them, ‘It is I; do not be afraid.’ Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land towards which they were going.

Some thoughts for further Reflection:

In the reading this morning Jesus is doing his usual teaching and miracle thing. In the original Greek language, we are told that the crowds were continually following Jesus because he was continually doing miracles: so far, so good. It is getting close to Passover and there is a crowd approaching Jesus and the disciples. It is also getting close to dinner time, and because they are out in the hills, there is no food to give to a crowd that has been chasing after Jesus all day.

Not that long ago in our country – usually immune from such things – there was a panic about food (and toilet rolls!). Flour, pasta, rice eggs were all scarce (usually not because the food itself was, but the receptacles and packing they came in were at a shortage. Supermarkets often order produce based on sales at the same time 12 months previous. A year after the ‘shortage’ a local supermarket gave away to our Food Share project 250kg of dried pasta…even though it was not even close to being out of date, they had over-ordered by that much ). I often get ‘hangry’ – that phenomenon where you are so hungry that it irritates and makes us snappy with people. In lots of parts of the world today, and in the time and place that Jesus was, for a lot of people, food was a more pressing concern than we are used to.

The crowds around Jesus are made up of the spiritually, and the physically needy. All of them are ready for dinner – there is a good chance that some of that crowd have not eaten much food for quite some time. It is at that point that Jesus turns to his disciple Philip and asks him where they will get food from to feed them all.

On the one hand this is a perfectly acceptable question: Philip is from Bethsaida which is the nearest town to where the crowd are; if anyone knew where to get food from it was Philip. However, it is also a frankly daft question. There are five thousand men in the crowd. We can hazard a guess that there were a good number of women and children too. So even if Philip does know where to get food from with over five thousand people it would **take eight months** of the average person’s wages to buy the food to feed them all. There is no way that Philip can get all the food that is necessary (if he could, how would he carry it all?!).

*And that is why Jesus asked Philip the question: it was to test him*.

If you look at the text you will see that Philip responds by restating the problem. Who wouldn’t? ‘I don’t have an answer Jesus, but let me tell you what the problem is again just in case, in the last thirty seconds, you have forgotten what it was: It would take over half a year’s wages just to give each of these people one mouth full each.’

But then Andrew comes along, he doesn’t have much, and what he does have he thinks won’t help, but what he has he is willing to give. It is worth saying that again. In **verse 9** Andrew shows that he doesn’t have much faith that what he has can make a difference; but he is willing to offer what he has.

Which one are you most like, Philip or Andrew? Do you reiterate the problem, or do you offer what you have even if you think it is not much?

I don’t always feel I have much to offer. Time and again I come back to God and I have to ask for forgiveness. Time and again I am reminded of my own weaknesses and how easily I make mistakes. Like the Apostle Paul, I am the chief of sinners, the least of the saints.

Some of you might feel the same. You feel you are too sinful to be of any use to God. Perhaps you feel too young to have anything to offer. Perhaps you feel too old and that you don’t have anything to give anymore. Perhaps you don’t think that God has given you any gifts, perhaps you think you are not good enough.

All of these feelings are perfectly understandable. And it is easy to make these feelings into some form of worship. We say, “God you are holy, and I am worthless.” and it sounds very religious and good. And in our hearts, we determine that we have nothing to give to God so we are just here in church to watch what happens.

After all, I can’t save the world, I can’t feed the poor, free the captives, give sight to the blind or preach freedom to those who don’t know God. So, I’ll just remind God how impossible the task is and do nothing.

But then you get Andrew.

“Jesus, I don’t have much. But me and this small boy here have five loaves of fish and two pieces of fish.”

I love it. Can you imagine the earnest look on his face? Can you imagine him hoping that what he has might be useful, somehow and in some way? I like to think that the small boy is being a bit sheepish: ‘No, you tell him Andrew, I don’t really want to bother Jesus.’

Barley bread was cheap bread. It was the equivalent of Tesco value. The fish was there to try and make it taste better. The only problem was that the fish would have been dried, or even worse, pickled. There is no amount of pickled fish that makes cheap bread taste better.

“Jesus I don’t have much, and what I have is the cheap stuff. I’m not even sure you can do anything with it. But what I do have is yours.”

So we can put our gifts, our time, and even put our money – however little – at Jesus’ disposal.

**Moses**

There is a third interesting character in this morning’s reading: Moses the leader of the nation of Israel who took them from captivity in Egypt to freedom on the edge of the Promised Land. This passage doesn’t actually mention Moses anywhere, but Moses is all over this story.

We are told that the Passover meal was about to happen. The Passover, as you may well know, is the Jewish celebration of the time that Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt.

In verse 5 of the John passage there is a question of where enough food to feed the crowd will come from. Moses asks the same question in **Numbers 11.13,** the part of the Bible that tells of the escape from Egypt.

If we were to read on in the John passage this morning at **verse 31** there is a direct reference to *manna* the heavenly food that God gave to the Israelites when the escaped Egypt. (You will be reminded of this a lot in the coming weeks: the lectionary dwells for a long time on the long chapter 6 of John’s Gospel). And after the miracle the crowd believe that Jesus is a prophet, a prophet just like Moses, because out of nothing he has given the people something to eat, just like Moses did.

*But the people are wrong*.

Moses was a prophet of God. Jesus is God. Moses gave the people food to eat when there was none. Jesus himself is the bread of life and those that eat his flesh will never hunger again. Moses led the Israelites through the water, Jesus walked on top of the water.

The people want to make Jesus king. They want to do this because he has fed 5,000 people. That’s pretty remarkable, but Jesus refuses to be crowned because of that. Jesus waits for his crown - a crown of thorns - he’ll take it when he dies because in dying Jesus gives to the world what it really needs…

Which isn’t bread. It is a saviour.

Which brings us back to Philip or Andrew or you.

The need is a saviour and Jesus says to us, “How will you take me to the world?”

And we say, “I couldn’t do that even if I was a good preacher. I couldn’t do that even if I had six months wages spare. I couldn’t do that even if I was twenty years older. I couldn’t do that even if I was twenty years younger. I couldn’t do that even if I had never sinned. I couldn’t do that even if I was 100% healthy. I couldn’t do that as I don’t have the education. I couldn’t do that even if it were my job which I don’t think it is. I couldn’t do that even if I had tried it before, which I haven’t.”

Or we say, “Jesus, all I’ve got is cheap bread and pickled fish but take it and use it if you can.”

And Jesus takes us, he lifts us up, he gives thanks to God for us, and then he breaks us and sends us into the world.

Harry Steele

Prayers

Blessed are you, Lord our God,

in your love and care for your creation.

You do not turn away any who come to you,

You come to meet the seekers

and provide refreshment for all who hunger and thirst.

You care for the broken and the fragmented

and want nothing to be lost.

Blessed are you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We come to you, dear Lord, as seekers;

we are hungry for your love and your care.

We ask you to bless all who are pilgrims and seekers,

all who long for an awareness of your presence and your power.

We remember before you all who bring healing

and refreshment to your people.

We pray for preachers and pastors,

for leaders of prayer groups and retreat conductors

and for all places of pilgrimage.

*Silence*

Lord, have mercy:

**let us know your compassion and care.**

We give thanks for our daily bread

and for all who provide us with our food and shelter.

We pray for farmers and fishermen,

for those who work in our shops

and all who prepare food for us to eat.

We remember before you all who are hungry and weary.

We ask you to bless all who suffer

from poverty, from famine or from natural disasters.

We pray especially for the world poor

and those who are deeply in debt.

*Silence*

Lord, have mercy:

**let us know your compassion and care.**

We give you thanks for the comfort and security of our homes.

Lord, give your blessing to all our loved ones and friends.

We pray for any who may feel lonely or uncared for

within our community.

We remember all carers, social workers and helpers,

*Silence*

Lord, have mercy:

**let us know your compassion and care.**

Lord, we bring before you all whose lives are fragmented

people who are broken in body, mind or spirit.

We remember all who feel shattered and exhausted,

all who long for your healing touch.

We pray for all who seek hope and peace,

that they may come to you and rest in your presence

*Silence*

Lord, have mercy:

**let us know your compassion and care.**

You are the God who takes our weakness

and makes us strong

We come to you as mortals

and you offer us immortality.

In your loving presence,

we remember friends and loved ones departed

and ask that not one is lost

but gathered into the fullness of joy in your kingdom.

*Silence*

Merciful Father,

**accept these prayers**

**for the sake of your Son,**

**our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

David Adams

Let us pray for the coming of the kingdom in the words our Saviour taught us

**Our Father in heaven,**

**Hallowed by your name,**

**Your kingdom come,**

**Your will be done,**

**On earth as in heaven.**

**Give us today our daily bread.**

**Forgive us our sins**

**As we forgive those who sin against us.  
lead us not into temptation**

**But deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours**

**Now and forever. Amen**