8th Sunday after Trinity (Year A)

Sermon Rev Pete Bone

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Over the last few weeks we have been travelling through the Gospel of Matthew. We have been getting to know some of the ways of Jesus; we have been looking at His teaching by use of the parable and now in chapter fourteen we move into something different. First though, we need to set the scene; after the parables at the end of Chapter thirteen we read of the rejection of Jesus at Nazareth.

This is followed by the retelling of the story of the beheading of Jesus' cousin and friend, John the Baptist. After John's death Herod heard of what Jesus was doing and concluded that he was John the Baptist raised from the dead. While Herod didn't threaten to kill Jesus that possibility hangs over the text as we read a flashback of Herod's birthday party, of Herodias' scheming, of the daughter's dance, of Herod's promise and John's head on a platter. All of that precedes and relates to today's text, the feeding of the five thousand.

After all of the above, if you were Jesus how would be feeling? If you had been rejected by your own kind how do you think you might feel? If your great friend had been murdered, how would you feel? Just take a moment to ponder them thoughts.

Now hold them thoughts as we move into today's reading. It might have been fear or grief or mere timing that made Jesus get into a boat and withdraw to a desolate place. How recognisable is it to us that need to withdraw; to get away!

As Jesus moved away from the world, a great amount of people decide to follow Him, well not follow exactly but to get ahead and be waiting for the boat to land and for Jesus to come ashore.

Jesus approaches what he believes to be the desolate place only to see thousands of people waiting for him; thousands of men women and children milling about. Imagine the noise; imagine the dust in the air, imagine the sights and sounds that lay before Jesus. I wonder if He felt an urge to row away. I wonder if this was an out of the frying pan and into the fire moment.

But I find what happens next is astounding. For me this reading is not all about the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, which by the way is the only miracle recorded in all four Gospels, but more about the nature of God. I believe that His nature is captured in this moment for all time: Jesus saw the crowd, and felt compassion for them.

The compassion felt in Jesus overrides the need to withdraw; it is a compassion that overrides every human instinct and emotion. It is a compassion that truly shows the love of God to His people. It is amazing grace.

It is a compassionate nature that prompts Him to walk among the crowd healing the sick. We know Jesus feeds the five thousand but in the healing of the sick we see another of the miracles that is part of this moment set before us.

Later in the day, in the way that all things go, the night begins to draw close and the disciples, who must have arrived with the crowd, must be feeling tired and hungry. It is in the closing of the day that they also felt compassion for the multitude.

They move and try to get the attention of Jesus to pose the question of supplies. This is a desolate place with no food and the people must be getting hungry by now. They decide what is needed and begin to tell the crowd to move off into the surround villages and find food to feed themselves. It's as if Jesus was waiting for this moment.

This is why I said at the beginning that this was something different; now we move from the theory derived from the parable to the practical where there is a problem confronting the disciples that actually needs to be solved.

Jesus said: "They don't need to go away. You give them something to eat". YOU give them something to eat. The obedience of the disciples was important to this miracle just as our obedience is important to the kingdom today.

They had only five loaves of bread and two fish but what seemed impossible became possible. Jesus took the five loaves and the two fish looked up to heaven and gave thanks, He broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. Everyone ate and all were satisfied. There were even twelve basketfuls of broken pieces left over. The hungry were fed and the sick were cured because compassion was greater than all else in that moment.

We can equate this in a way to and even before the Covid pandemic. It is true to say that many people struggle with many things, from debt and addiction to putting food on the table. Though the situations are always different the fact remains that hunger is hunger.

Food Banks are part of the world we know but during the pandemic and in lockdown Food Hubs sprouted up as good people sourced and distributed to those in great need. The Church was very active in this as compassion once again worked in the veins of good people who not for their own gain went that extra mile to feed the hungry.

The requirement therefor is that there will be moments when it is you and me, the followers of Jesus who need to act, to do something, to make a difference. When we feel compassion and are compelled to act toward an event, a place or a person then we are called to see it through, not to defer or delegate but to act. Jesus said to his disciples YOU give them something to eat and they did.

Amen

Reverend Pete Bone

2nd August 2020