

# ***Sermon***

***23 November 2014***

***West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood***

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***Text: Matthew 14:13-21***

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Talking about lots of people to feed: A woman invited some people for tea. At the table, she turned to her six-year-old daughter and said, "Would you like to say grace?" "I wouldn't know what to say," the girl replied. "Just say what you heard Mummy say," the mum answered. The daughter bowed her head and said, "Lord, why on earth did I invite all these people to dinner?"

I watched the news this weekend and saw that relief agencies are providing nutritious food to the people in Ebola stricken countries, because well-nourished people will be able to fight off this deadly virus better than weak and hungry people.

And I thought – wow, that's amazing. A simple contribution towards a solution in regards to a huge big problem... Making sure that people's bodies are strong enough to fight back when attacked by a virus may not be the solution to the problem, but it will make a big difference in the efforts to contain and get rid of the virus.

At this point in time, I think Ebola is such a big, scary threat that people could easily feel overwhelmed by it, but making a simple contribution,

like feeding the people, will definitely have a huge positive effect in the affected areas.

Because people need food to be able to live.

Our Scripture lesson today was about Jesus feeding a crowd of 5000 men and their families. Let's go take a look at what happened there...

Jesus was in Galilee, a densely populated city with nowhere to go for a little peace and quiet. He just received bad news – King Herod beheaded John the Baptist, somebody who wasn't only fighting for the same cause Jesus was fighting for, but who was also a family member and a friend.

Jesus was sad and probably just wanted a little time on his own to come to terms with what just happened, so he decided to get in a boat and go to the other side of the river.

But the crowds of needy people saw what he was doing and walked along to meet him at the other side.

Now, it would have been quite normal to feel irritated by this, because all Jesus did all day long was *give* – he healed people and he taught people, and he just needed a wee break before he would continue with this – but no such luck!

When Jesus came to shore at the solitary place he was heading for, he saw a large crowd there waiting for him. And what did he do? He didn't

say: “Just give me a break people; I need a little time out!” No – his first reaction was compassion.

We read that “Jesus had compassion on them and healed their sick.” So pushing his own needs to the background, he tended to the needs of the people, and he didn’t even feel sorry for himself because he didn’t get his intended time of reflection and solitude.

And this went on for such a long time that it started getting late and his disciples were getting worried about dinner. They were in a remote place, there wasn’t any shops around for the people to go buy themselves something to eat, and the disciples probably thought that Jesus was so busy taking care of the people, that he wouldn’t even notice what the time was.

They urged Jesus to send the crowds away to the villages so they could go get themselves some food.

But the crowds came there for a reason, and Jesus wasn’t accustomed to sending people away empty-handed. So Jesus said to his disciples: “They do not need to go away. *You* give them something to eat.”

The disciples must have thought: “WHAT?! Look at this crowd! People as far as the eye can see. All we have here is 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. That’s barely enough to feed just ourselves with...”

It wasn’t much. But because Jesus was there, it was enough. Jesus gave thanks for the food, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples and asked them to distribute it to the people in the crowd.

Jesus didn't make a huge big show of what was about to happen. He didn't make a mountain of bread and fish appear and have the people stampede each other to get their hands on something to eat. The bread and fish just kept coming until everybody was fed, and there was even some left over. So without making a big deal out of it, Jesus fed all those people, as if it was the most normal thing on earth to do.

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To me, this story is about much more than a miracle. Yes – Jesus performed an amazing miracle – to be able to feed 5000 men and their families with 5 loaves of bread and 2 fishes is not something that happens every day. It shows that God can do anything. God will provide in the needs of his children, even in those times when it doesn't look humanly possible.

But it's about more than that. It shows that Jesus never gets tired of us. He doesn't mind if we ask him things over and over again. He doesn't take time-out if we need him.

And ultimately it means that in Jesus we can find everything we need. No matter what we are hungry for, we can find it in Jesus. We don't have to go look anywhere else.

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Bread and fish was the basic diet people lived on in New Testament times. The crowd came to Jesus for a reason. He wasn't going to send them home empty-handed. But he didn't provide them with an

extravagant 3 course meal either – he gave them what they needed, and that was enough.

And I think that sometimes we miss *that* when we come to Jesus with our needs. Sometimes we are so focused on that fancy 3 course meal, that we don't even see the bread and fish lying in front of us. Jesus will always give us what we need, but that isn't always exactly the same as what we want...

The disciples were convinced that they were going to have a crisis of immense proportions if Jesus didn't send the people home, but the crowds didn't seem too worried at all about what was going to happen at teatime.

Looking at this story from the outside, it does seem strange that the people who were closest to Jesus, his disciples, who spent lots of time with him and knew him well, got worried. They were the ones who were supposed to *know* that Jesus would be able to sort this problem.

We should know that too. We shouldn't look for solutions everywhere in the world and then come to God as a last resort. We should go to God straight away if we have a problem! And then he will give us what we need.

Every Sunday in church we ask for our "daily bread", for sustenance for the week to come. We don't ask for a steak pie with tatties and peas, followed by sticky toffee pudding – because we know that would just be cheeky! But very often Jesus gives us more than we need in any case.

I think that this story is trying to teach us that we can ask absolutely anything from God, and that he *will* give us what we need, but also that we should be satisfied with what he gives us.

Sometimes if we go to him with a problem, he might not take the source of our worries away straight away, but he might give us something else, something like patience, or wisdom, or courage, or perseverance... He'll give us what we need. But most importantly: He'll never send us away empty-handed.

The disciples only focused on what they didn't have – enough food for that huge crowd. But Jesus tried to teach them to focus on what they *did* have – 5 loaves and 2 fishes could be turned into a meal for many. I think that if we go through difficult times, we shouldn't only focus on our problems, but make an effort to also see all the good things we have in our lives too.

We should bring what we have to the table. The little we have to offer might seem useless against the vast needs of the world, but God will bless it and spread it. Jesus said: "You provide the bread; I will take care of the miracle".

So every little thing we can do might make a huge difference in the end. Whether this is a word of hope or a helping hand, whether it is to help support your neighbour or an effort to help stop Ebola spreading – always remember – the 5 loaves and 2 fishes wasn't much, but in the end it turned out to be enough.

So whether you are hungry for love, support, company; whether you long for healing or reconciliation... Don't go look for it in all the empty places in the world. Come look for it here, God can give you everything you need.

Even things that seem humanly impossible can become a reality in the presence of God. Let's ask for the perseverance to never give up when times are tough, and for the wisdom to realise when something we get is an answer to prayer.

God will never send somebody who comes to him away empty-handed. Ever.

Amen