

Trinity United Reformed Church Wimbledon



Sunday 2 August 2020

Order of Service for Worship At Home

Gathering in God's presence (If you have one, light a candle.)

Call to Worship (drawn from Psalm 145.15-18)

The eyes of all look to you, our God, for you feed us when we hunger.
You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing.
The LORD is just in every way, and all God's deeds are kind.
The LORD is near to all who call upon God's name.

Hymn

Break thou the bread of life,
dear Lord, to me,
as thou didst break the loaves
beside the sea;

beyond the sacred page
I seek thee, Lord,
my spirit longs for thee,
O living Word.

Bless thou the truth, dear Lord,
to me, to me,
as thou didst bless the bread
by Galilee;

then shall all bondage cease,
all fetters fall,
and I shall find my peace,
my all in all.

Mary A Lathbury. Public domain text.

Prayer of Approach

Take time to identify three things you want to thank God for, then join in the prayer:

Loving God, we give you thanks and praise for all that you have done for us.

For your whole created universe bursting with life and infinite possibilities, a universe created and yet still being created.

For the beauty and fragility of our spinning planet, the blue oceans, swarming with life, and the green and verdant earth.

For our fellow human beings, people of many colours, of many languages, of many abilities, yet all your children.

We give you thanks for the life, death, and resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ. For the message which he brings, for the life in us which he renews, and the example he has given us to follow.

We give you thanks for the Holy Spirit, sweeping through all of life with boundless energy, at once as gentle as the breath of a child, and yet as fierce as a raging storm, lifting us up in your grace.

Hear us, Lord, as in our own hearts and minds we give you thanks for your presence in our lives....

[Prayer from "Worship: from the United Reformed Church" (© 2003), p.92. Used by permission]

For all these things we give you our heartfelt praise, Father Almighty, in the power of the Holy Spirit, through Jesus Christ your Son – who teaches us to pray together:...

The Lord's Prayer

Use either of these forms, or a different version/language if you prefer:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be 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.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.

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.

Listening for God's Word

Bible Reading: Matthew 14.13-21

13 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. **14** When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. **15** 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.' **16** Jesus said to them, 'They need not go away; you give them something to eat.' **17** They replied, 'We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.' **18** And he said, 'Bring them here to me.' **19** 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. **20** And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. **21** And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

[In the video of the service a Theme Introduction will be included here, followed by an introduction to this week's Junior Church activities]

Hymn

Here we come with gladness,
gifts of love to bring,
praising him who loves us,
Christ our Saviour King.

Small may be the offering,
but the Lord will use
every gift we bring him;
none will he refuse.

More and more for Jesus
may we gladly give;
giving, giving, giving
is the way to live.

Julia H Johnston. Public domain text. Tune: 'Glenfinlas'.

Bible Reading: Isaiah 55.1-5

- 1** Ho, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and you that have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.
- 2** Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labour for that which does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.
- 3** Incline your ear, and come to me;
listen, so that you may live.
I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David.
- 4** See, I made him a witness to the peoples,
a leader and commander for the peoples.
- 5** See, you shall call nations that you do not know,
and nations that do not know you shall run to you,
because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel,
for he has glorified you.

Reflection

Preaching to a people just returning from long years of exile, a people hesitant about what they can or can't do, and daunted by the task that lies ahead of them of rebuilding society, Isaiah says Come. With your hunger and your thirst, and yes with

your empty pockets – come, and be fed, not with what you can purchase but with what your God is freely giving, the promise of life and purpose and steadfast love.

There's something especially resonant in Isaiah's words, of course, as we think about our first Bible reading today – Matthew's account of the Feeding of the Five Thousand. With a massive crowd fed to satisfaction from the humblest of resources, till there's baskets full of leftovers, it's a prophecy which finds a clear fulfilment in Jesus.

And because this miracle is one of the more familiar Bible stories, because it so clearly seems to illustrate the old saying that a little goes a long way, it's tempting to focus on trying to explain the miracle, trying to understand what happened, how Jesus did it, and so make sense of the process.

*But I think it's more helpful, when considering this miraculous feeding that appears one way or another in all four Gospels, to leave to one side the distraction and debate over what really happened and how. And instead, to ponder together: for our Church and our world today, what does this **mean**?*

*The **first** meaning of the miracle that I think we can point to, arises from the way food and mealtimes are so often featured within the Bible: as a means of **constituting community**.*

In our particular culture, I think there's been a growing temptation to squeeze the whole mealtime experience down to the minimum. In normal times we hear of office workers scoffing a quick sandwich at their desk, still focusing on their spreadsheet or their word document, or sometimes skipping lunch hour altogether. There's plenty of anecdotal evidence of teenagers and even adults sitting round the meal table, not talking to each other but instead fixated on their mobile phones, or sometimes taking their plate to another room entirely. I'm not sure what effect Lockdown has had on that, whether it's intensified it or perhaps lessened it; but in so many ways our society's problematic food habits are just one symptom of our society's problematic tendency towards individualism, atomisation, a weakening of community.

Yet the stories of the Bible hold out a different vision. In the New Testament and in the Hebrew Scriptures alike, the meal-table is a place where people are brought together and bound together and renewed together, not just within different families but as community.

Think of Abraham and Sarah, welcoming God's messengers and feeding them and so receiving the promise of a son through whom nations will be born and blessed. Think of Moses leading the Israelites out from slavery towards their promised freedom – an Exodus begun with a passover meal in their homes, and sustained by gifts of manna and quails in the wilderness.

Think of the notoriety that Jesus attracted on account of his habitual choice of dinner companions - "this man eats with sinners and tax collectors". Think of the Lord's Supper, the sacramental sharing of bread and wine to which Jesus would command his disciples and which the Church has kept ever since.

So in this sense, I think the thrust of the Feeding of the 5,000 is not that people who are hungry get food – but rather that they are fed together, and so formed as a community. Even though the disciples have assumed that if the crowd wants to eat they'll all have to disperse, be sent away, each to buy food for themselves – Jesus says NO – they need not go away – and he feeds them, and so shapes them into a new people, a body, with himself as their centre and head. And even our churches today are called and named as belonging to that same community, that one

community of God's people formed around Jesus. And we see that the sharing of something as simple as bread and fish is every bit as effective in creating community as a lavish banquet would be, because with Jesus on the scene a little goes a long way. So right now we might be feeling anxious and vulnerable because we've had to be necessarily scattered as a congregation for such a long time – but still we are held together, as we always have been, by Jesus Christ.

The **second** meaning of the parable is what we might call **describing discipleship**. And it's found in the whole new perspectives that open up when we think about where this wonder comes in the Gospel account, when we think about what's come before.

Our reading today is from Matthew chapter 14; but I think there are some deliberate echoes of a passage from the end of Matthew chapter 9, beginning of chapter 10 where Jesus calls his disciples and sends them out in mission. We looked at that passage back in June, when Katrina provided our reflection showing how the compassion of Jesus takes shape in our commission as disciples. And that's precisely where the echo comes: in both instances, Matthew very particularly writes of a great crowd, and of Jesus having compassion for them, and so instructing his disciples to get to work.

You could say we have a pair of book-ends, seven church weeks and four Bible chapters apart. Jesus involves his disciples in feeding a crowd upon whom he has compassion; and that mirrors his compassion for a crowd which prompted him to commission his disciples in the first place.

So in this sense, I think the importance of the Feeding of the 5,000 is found not so much in its spectacle – but rather in what it has to say about the role of the disciples. Because, remember, when Matthew or any of the Gospel writers are telling us about what Jesus got the Twelve to do, it's a fair assumption that we who are disciples of Jesus today are supposed to be doing something similar. So here, what's significant is that even though the disciples feel they've got little to offer – just five loaves and a couple of fish – Jesus particularly works through their little and makes it go a long way. Jesus blesses their gift, and entrusts it back to them, so that with it they can minister to others. And so it is with us: even when our first inclination is that we're too limited or mediocre to be of use to people, still Jesus says NO, come on, YOU give – and it is Jesus who empowers and magnifies our giving.

And that leads to the **third** meaning of this miracle: **heralding heaven**. Because what has come between these two book-end passages in Matthew's Gospel, broadly speaking, is a sequence of teaching: on what discipleship entails, on the identity and authority of Jesus, and on recognising and responding to God's kingdom.

It's that latter aspect – God's kingdom – which has been the theme of the parables in Matthew 13 which we've been exploring over the last three Sundays. Starting off with the sower and the seed; then the wheat and the weeds; then a couple which we skipped over (although Junior Church did cover them I think), the mustard seed and the parable of the yeast; and then last Sunday, hidden treasure and a pearl of great price and the fish in the fishing net.

Now what's quite striking about that list of parables is that five out of the seven have something to do with bread or grain or fish. We're back on the theme of food, so central to the miracle and at the heart of the community aspect we were thinking about earlier; but here it's saying something different again, because of the stories Jesus has told the people before he shows them this sign.

So in this sense, I think what matters about the Feeding of the 5,000 is not that it

astonishes us with something we can't explain – but rather that it somehow brings to life the parables of the Kingdom of Heaven that Jesus has so recently told. As he has spoken of fish gathered from the net, so now a little gift of fish is scattered among the crowd and feeds them all. As he has spoken of grain that's harvested in abundance, and the bread that is made from it, so now loaves are brought which each feed a thousand. Here, what's significant is that even when the circumstances of life become so present and oppressive that thoughts of faith feel marginal, pushed to the edges – Jesus interrupts our preoccupation by cultivating that seed of faith within us, until it brings forth abundantly. This feeding is an enacted parable; for Jesus heralds heaven, makes it present, by bringing us to know and align ourselves with God's will. And like a mustard seed, God's kingdom grows in us – our little goes a long way.

*Three precious facets of meaning in this miracle, as Jesus feeds the crowd and so feeds us with truth. And as we'd expect, they're all present in the passage we heard from Isaiah. **Heralding Heaven**, with the promise of wine and milk, priceless fare offered without price, without charge. **Describing Discipleship**, in the instruction to be careful in our listening for God's instruction, to direct our energies no longer towards what does not satisfy but instead towards God's work. And **Creating Community**, as it is solemnly and confidently declared that peoples formerly unknown shall be drawn together in a unity of praise as God's glorious purposes are revealed.*

And one last thought: perhaps Isaiah's word resonates and reassures today also. For not unlike his community of returning exiles, we find ourselves just tentatively emerging from an experience of displacement but still unsure about what will and won't be possible in the new normal, and acutely conscious of just how hard it will be for communities to recover. Perhaps it is to us too, that Isaiah wants to say Come, be assured that God is here and God is at work, among you, and in you – until there are baskets to spare.

Responding to God's grace

Praying for Needs & Concerns (led by Peter Smith)

At the start of our service Dominic asked you to think of three things to be thankful for. Similarly, I am asking you to think of personal things you want to ask God to do in the future.

I will be praying for relatives whose income has all but dried up, and for our daughter, Rebecca, often close to the end of her tether after four months of unvarying life with three small children. And seeing her has given me insight into other lives that have passed their breaking points and reached mental illness or physical abuse.

Let us pray.

In our readings we have heard how you lovingly provide for our needs – our essential needs rather than all our wants. Guide us all in what we ask for ourselves and others and keep our hearts always open to what you want us to do.
We thank you for your love.

We pray for your church throughout the world, particularly those who, like us, are physically isolated from their fellow believers. Help them all to maintain their faith and may their faith be strengthened by being forced to do things differently.

We pray for those facing persecution because of their love for you for whom not being able to meet openly together is their normal normal.
We thank you for your love.

We thank you for Dominic's ministry here at Trinity and ask you to be with him and his family when they move to Barnet.
Be with us all here as we move into an uncertain future not certain of when we will meet again in church, not certain of what our services will be like, not certain of how long we will have no minister, not certain of what our new minister will be like. But certain in our knowledge that you love us and will provide – possibly in unexpected ways.
We thank you for your love.

We pray for governments and leaders here, and in all other countries. May they make their momentous decisions with both integrity and compassion and be with them when hindsight shows they were tragically wrong. Help us both to accept, and sympathise with, their failures, and also to show thanks for their successes. Help us remember that you love them, and us, through all our despairs and joys.
We thank you for your love.

We pray for all those in education.
We pray for any pupils who have lacked effective learning these last four months whose progress has gone into reverse and who may have difficulty ever catching up. And we pray for all teachers, assistants and administrators facing re-opening safely, and as nearly normally as possible, in September. Help them all work together, in love, to overcome the unprecedented challenges they face. Help us all show appreciation that they are now probably the most important group of workers in the country.
We thank you for your love.

We pray for our families and friends at Trinity and beyond those, possibly unknown to us, but for whom Trinity has received emailed prayer requests for those dreading the ending of furlough in the next three months for families broken by the stresses of lockdown for those now scared of resuming their lives when restrictions are eased and finally, silently in our hearts, we bring our own personal requests
We thank you for your love.

We pray that the good that has come out of covid-19 will be remembered.
We pray that the renewed sense of community will be built on that people will continue to care for neighbours with increased goodwill and love.
We pray that governments will remember, with humility, that Covid-19 showed that nature is beyond their control that they can only do their best for their people.
We thank you for your love.

And, in the words of our final hymn: Go forth and tell, God's love embraces all.
Amen

Offertory

This is an opportunity to set aside your regular financial contribution to Trinity's ongoing work and witness. You might like to put it in a jar for now, ready to be brought in person when circumstances allow. Then say the prayer below (if you already participate in Trinity's Planned Giving scheme via direct bank transfer, then simply recite the prayer – no need for a jar!).

Generous God, your gift to me
is life, and sustenance, and hope.
I bring to you my gift, and myself.
Receive, Lord, and bless:
so that both gift and giver
may bring blessing to others,
and glory to your name. Amen.

Hymn

Go forth and tell! O Church of God, awake!
God's saving news to all the nations take:
proclaim Christ Jesus, Saviour, Lord and King,
that all the world his glorious praise may sing.

Go forth and tell! God's love embraces all;
he will in grace respond to all who call:
how shall they call if they have never heard
the gracious invitation of his word?

Go forth and tell! The doors are open wide:
share God's good gifts - let no one be denied;
live out your life as Christ your Lord shall choose,
your ransomed powers for his sole glory use.

Go forth and tell! O Church of God, arise!
Go in the strength which Christ your Lord supplies;
go till all nations his great name adore
and serve him, Lord and King for evermore.

James E Seddon © M Seddon / Jubilate Hymns Ltd. CCLI 11603. Tune: 'Woodlands'.

Closing Prayer and Blessing

If it is God who has brought us here,
if God has met us here, and fed our spirits here,
then let us go from this time of worship
as God's people, set free to love and to serve.

So may the blessing of God Almighty,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
be upon us, and among all who are dear to us,
whether near or far,
today and always. Amen.