

You Give Them Something to Eat

Matthew 14:13-21 | Isaiah 55:1-5

Preacher: Canon Nitano Muller

In the name of our Loving, Liberating and Life-giving God. **Amen.**

SETTING THE SCENE

"You give them something to eat."

There are moments in Scripture when Jesus says something so astonishing that we almost miss how impossible it sounds.

This is one of them.

The disciples stand before a crowd that Matthew tells us numbers five thousand men, besides women and children. It is late in the day. They are in a deserted place. There are no supermarkets. No catering team t hand to assist.

The disciples do what sensible people do: They assess the situation. They count the cost and measure the resources. They come to the only logical conclusion.

"Send the crowds away." (I read that in my mother's voice)

There is no cruelty in those words. They are simply being realistic.

But the Kingdom of God has never been built on what is merely practical and realistic.

Jesus looks at this impossible situation and replies with six words that have echoed through the centuries:

"They need not go away. You give them something to eat."

Imagine the silence and bewilderment that followed.

The disciples must surely have looked over their shoulders to see if Jesus was speaking to someone else.

Us? Surely not us.

Have you seen how many people there are? Have you seen what we've got?

Five loaves. Two fish.

Lord... this isn't enough by a long-shot.

And perhaps that is where this Gospel ceases to be an ancient miracle story and becomes painfully contemporary.

Because I suspect many of us have arrived here this morning carrying exactly the same objection.

We wake to news of wars that seem never to end. We witness children starving while others waste more food than entire families will eat in a week. We hear of refugees crossing seas in desperation, of communities fractured by hatred, of prejudice becoming louder, of loneliness becoming deeper, of creation itself groaning beneath the weight of our consumption.

And somewhere inside us a quiet voice whispers: *"What difference could I possibly make?"*

We are overwhelmed not because we do not care.

We are overwhelmed because we care deeply, friends. I know you do

The world's hunger feels far greater than the bread we carry.

And yet Jesus does not mince his words:

"You give them something to eat."

OLD TESTAMENT CONNECTION

Isaiah gives us a remarkable picture of God's Kingdom.

"Come, everyone who thirsts."

Not those who can afford it. Not those who deserve it.

Not those who have proved themselves worthy.

Simply... *"Come."*

"Buy wine and milk without money and without price."

Isaiah imagines a world that runs according to an entirely different economy.

The kingdoms of this world ask, *What can you produce and by when?*

God asks, *What do you need?*

The kingdoms of this world reward the successful and productive.

God welcomes the thirsty.

The kingdoms of this world create scarcity. God creates abundance.

This is why the Eucharist remains one of the most quietly revolutionary acts we embody.

Every week we gather with empty hands, No one purchases the grace of God.

No one earns a place at Christ's table. We simply receive.

And then, having received, we are sent.

We come as guests.

We leave as servants.

We are fed so that we may become bread for the world.

LIVING THE WORD

Some years ago, while I was still serving in Cape Town, I had an experience that has stayed with me ever since.

An elderly woman, devoted in her attendance at our cathedral's weekday Eucharist (St George's Cathedral, Cape Town), walked past those standing in silent vigil for Palestine which we did weekly on Wednesday's at noon. Quietly she asked me,

"What have you achieved after all this time standing here?"

It is an understandable question.

It is also one that reveals something of the world we have created.

We have become a people obsessed with outcomes.

Everything must justify itself. Everything must produce measurable success.

Everything must prove its worth.

I heard another voice in her voice.

The voice of Sanballat (a pessimistic figure from the Old Testament in the Book of Nehemiah).

Standing outside Jerusalem while Nehemiah and the returned exiles rebuilt the city's broken walls.

"What are they doing?... Will they finish in a day?... Will they revive the stones from these heaps of rubbish?"

Notice what Sanballat is really asking.

He is not arguing that rebuilding Jerusalem is wrong. He simply mocks its apparent futility.

Can your tiny efforts really make any difference? Can these broken stones ever become a wall? Can these ordinary people really change anything?

Nehemiah never stops to argue. He simply keeps laying stone alongside others.

Stone after stone. Prayer after prayer. Day after day.

Until eventually there stands a wall where once there were only ruins.

Faithfulness often looks remarkably unimpressive while it is happening.

Seeds disappear into soil long before anyone sees a harvest.

Children learn to walk by falling more times than they stand.

Communities are healed one conversation at a time.

Peace and reconciliation is built one act of courage after another.

The Kingdom rarely arrives with fireworks. It usually grows quietly, almost unnoticed.

Like bread rising.

Like walls rebuilding.

Like loaves multiplying in the hands of Christ.

WHAT CAN I DO?

This week I found myself thinking about that question.

"What have you achieved, Nitano?"

If I am honest, life and ministry has felt difficult recently.

Personally. Professionally.

Perhaps you know that feeling.

Those moments when you wonder whether anything you do really matters.

Whether your efforts disappear into the vastness of the world's needs.

.... And then I looked back over last weekend.

It struck me that perhaps **THIS** is what Jesus meant.

Not solving everything. Simply offering what we have.

Last weekend this Cathedral became home to more than a hundred South Asian Christians from across our Diocese. People who carry with them incredible testimonies of silent faith and perseverance in the face of incredible adversity.

It was a celebration of faith, culture, belonging and joy.

In a world that profits from division, gathering people around one table is itself an act of hope.

Perhaps...

that is bread.

The next morning, I baptised a little boy called Jaxon at St Chad's in Wood End. A special faith community facing its own contextual challenges.

Jaxon wanted to be baptised wearing a white dress.

His parents, understandably, were rather anxious.

Standing beside the font, I found myself saying something I needed to hear as much as they did.

Before any of us are labelled by the world...

before society decides what it expects of us...

before anyone tells us who we should become...

God has already spoken.

"You are loved." And "You are mine."

Whoever this little human grows to be, he is claimed by the God who knows him completely and loves him perfectly.

Perhaps...

that too is bread.

Later that same day, I baptised Moses (who is here this morning)

Moses comes from the People's Republic of China.

For many Christians there, following Jesus is neither easy nor without cost.

Standing beside that remarkable font at the back of the Cathedral, carved from stone brought from the River Jordan itself, he publicly confessed Christ as his saviour, thanks be to God!

He could have chosen another road.

He chose this one. He chose Jesus.

Perhaps...

that is bread.

And then we welcomed a choir from Nairobi.

They enriched our worship with music that reminded us that God's Church has never belonged to one nation, one language or one culture.

Hospitality is not ours to own. It belongs to God.

Everything that belongs to God is given to be shared.

Perhaps...

hospitality is bread too.

None of those moments appeared on the evening news.

None ended a war. None solved poverty. None changed the global economy.

But every one of them pushed back against darkness.

Every one whispered that another Kingdom is already breaking into this one.

Every one was, in its own way, another loaf placed into Christ's hands.

CONCLUSION

Friends, I wonder whether we have misunderstood this miracle.

The miracle does not begin when bread multiplies.

The miracle begins when frightened disciples stop insisting that what they have is too small.

Jesus never asks them to create abundance. That is His work!

He asks them to surrender what they already have.

Five loaves. Two fish.

Enough for one little boy's lunch.

Apparently enough for the Kingdom of God to begin.

So perhaps the question is not,

"Can I change the world?"

Perhaps the question is,

"What has God already placed into my hands?"

Your kindness. Your patience.

Your voice. Your generosity.

Your table. Your prayers.

Your welcome. Your forgiveness.

Your willingness to stand beside those whom others overlook.

Do not underestimate these things.

The Kingdom never has.

Because God has always delighted in doing extraordinary things through people who believed they had very little to offer.

The Cross looked like failure. The tomb looked like defeat.

Five loaves looked hopelessly inadequate.

Appearances have never been God's strongest interest.

Faithfulness has.

In a few moments we shall make our way to the altar (or as close as we can get to it)

Once again, Christ will place bread into our hands.

It will not look like enough.

It never has.

Yet from this table Christians have gone out for two thousand years to found hospitals, establish schools, welcome strangers, feed the hungry, challenge injustice, reconcile enemies and proclaim hope in places where hope seemed impossible.

Not because the Church possessed enough but because Christ always does.

So today, bring your loaves. Bring your fish.

Bring your questions. Bring your weariness.

Bring your compassion. Bring the little you think cannot possibly matter.

Place it into the hands of Christ.

And when you leave this Cathedral today and step once more into a hungry world and listen carefully.

Above the noise of the headlines. Above the cynicism of our age.

Above the voice that says, "It will never make any difference."

Listen instead for the voice of Jesus.

The voice of Jesus still calling... Still trusting... Still sending.

Still believing that ordinary men, women and everyone in between can become signs of God's extraordinary Kingdom breaking through amongst us.

"You give them something to eat."

Now go! What are you waiting for...???