

### **A gathering prayer**

Mighty God of miracles, we come before you.  
We imagine what it might have been like  
being part of a crowd of 5,000.

There may be far fewer of us here today,  
but we think about the people in other churches in our town,  
village, and country, also worshipping you.  
Bound together by your great love,  
we gather in spirit to meet with you, Jesus.

**Amen.**

### **A prayer of adoration**

Lord God of compassion and boundless blessings,  
we are full of amazement  
that you care so greatly for the needs of your people.  
We worship and adore you for your generosity,  
your love, and your power.

**Amen.**

**Read** Matthew 14 verses 13-21

### **Sermon 2<sup>nd</sup> August by Janice Atfield**

I have to admit to being reminded of Tommy Cooper when I read about the feeding of the five thousand. Do you remember his famous glass and bottle trick? As was usually the case, he disguised his skill with the appearance of ineptitude: he would start with two tubes, one containing a bottle and the other, a glass and they would magically change places, but then things got out of control and bottles and glasses would appear from everywhere, piling up on the table; and in my mind's eye, I can imagine the scene as Jesus produces bread; from up his sleeves, out of his pockets and from behind his disciples' ears.

It's an important story- the only miracle, apart from the Resurrection which appears in all four gospels. In Matthew's Gospel, it comes after the death of John the Baptist: it's time for Jesus' ministry to point him towards Jerusalem. We read that, although Jesus had tried to be alone to consider the repercussions of this, he realised that people were desperate for him – they

were all hungry: both physically and spiritually. At first it seemed that their physical hunger would be unsatisfied as there was only one packed lunch available between over five thousand people: but after Jesus had blessed and broken it, there was enough for everyone.

It's very tempting to devote our mental energies to trying to decide, "what really happened?" – was it a miracle in the common understanding of that word, or did the miracle lie in persuading selfish people to share? But in our context this morning, which is an act of worship, this is inappropriate and unnecessary: we will be contemplating the story as an invitation to discover Jesus as THE BREAD OF LIFE.

Some people find this miracle difficult for another reason and this is that it seems to contradict Jesus' response in the wilderness where he was challenged to satisfy his hunger by turning stones into bread and subsequently, feeding others in the same way. – but notice this: - Jesus didn't turn anything into bread – the bread was already there; what he did was receive it, give thanks for it, bless it, break it and share it out – and what does this remind us of? It reminds us of the eucharist, communion, the Lord's supper: call it what you will – the demonstration of Jesus becoming the blessed and broken bread for all humanity.

So, this miracle story is a statement of faith, that Jesus is the bread of life – we are not palmed off with a cheap substitute:: we are not given a stone when we asked for bread, but God gave himself in the person of Jesus Christ and continues to do so.

In the post- resurrection stories, the risen Jesus is recognised when he feeds the disciples by breaking bread. In Luke's gospel, it is on the road to Emmaus which culminates in a re-enactment of the last supper. In John's gospel, Jesus remains a stranger on the shore until he prepares a breakfast of bread and fish. So the feeding of the five thousand is a prequel, a foreshadowing if you like, of the Last Supper and resurrection appearances showing that Jesus gives himself, abundantly, consistently, eternally and indiscriminately, fulfilling the prophecy found in both Isaiah and Revelation – "They shall not hunger or thirst".

If this story is about how Jesus is the bread of life, it must also be about hunger, all humans seem to experience spiritual hunger, the need to relate to something beyond themselves. Ancient cave paintings show images, shapes

and symbols that probably have a spiritual meaning which has been lost in the mists of time. Spiritual hunger seems to be built into us – the desire to have a relationship with our creator and this hunger has always been expressed and met with a community of faith: meeting together around a table.

So, how hungry are we? Are we like the people in the crowd who were so hungry for Jesus that they followed him everywhere, giving him no peace? Have we been so hungry for each other that we are longing for the day when we can meet again? What a treasure we have! We have the offer of a relationship with our creator who takes his responsibility towards us so seriously that he feeds us with himself in spite of our frequent ingratitude and indifference and sets us within a community, a body, in order to minister to each other's needs. If we took it for granted before all this madness descended upon us, may we never do so again.

### **Prayers of intercession**

Lord, today, we pray for people who have little or nothing:  
for those who feel trapped in their situation,  
and can't see the bigger picture,  
or even any tiny glimmer of light.

We pray for people who are hungry:  
for parents who struggle to feed their children, and themselves.  
We thank you for the work of food banks,  
and pray that they would have the resources  
to continue to meet so many needs.

We pray that you would give us an appreciation of our food:  
the work that goes into producing and distributing it.  
Teach us not to be wasteful,  
but to preserve and pass on the goodness of your earth.

**Amen.**