

Genesis 32:22-31

Psalm 17

Romans 9:1-8

Matthew 14:13-21

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Today Matthew squeezes a lot of messages and teaching into a simple story, a simple story that is so important it appears in some form in all four gospels; but the account really begins just before reading begins. Jesus goes to a deserted place to pray and to be alone with the Father. He has just learnt of the death of his cousin and friend, John the Baptist. Perhaps in sadness it was necessary for him to be with the Father, to pray, to be alone in the silence; but it was not to be. Wherever Jesus went the crowds followed; the inner grief that Jesus may have felt at the death of John the Baptist was turned to compassion for those who followed. So he went about healing and showing the glory of God to those who gathered.

In a time when he needed silence and space the people kept coming, and following, and Jesus had compassion on those assembled. As **we** gather in this account to listen to Jesus we gather as part of a large group eager to hear the Lord, but what do we bring as we gather? The crowd brings very little with them and they certainly bring no food or other provisions.

So, what does Jesus do:

He challenges the disciples; he challenges their ability to provide for the gathered crowd and their immediate reaction is to wonder how **they** can provide for such a large crowd. How can **they** feed the five thousand? And the truth is – they cannot; they cannot hope to feed the crowd because they have no provisions themselves; and the suggestion that the crowd should go into

the town is just as ridiculous. I wonder if one of the disciples stood on a rock and shouted if anybody had anything to eat. Ultimately to their disappointment all they had was some loaves and fishes – other gospels describe them as barley loaves and small fish. With that, on their own, they had no hope of feeding the five thousand; they would be lucky to feed two people.

Jesus then taught the crowd a lesson that would not be forgotten; that in their time of desperation all they needed to do was to turn to him and to trust him. Jesus would provide all they needed: in a scene reminiscent of Moses and the Jewish people in the wilderness having manna provided for them from above, Jesus provided for the people; and in doing that he provided for them out of very little. The provision for the people was from God, it was not of their own making but of God's making, and only God the Son could do that.

In many ways this story reflects the story of salvation: in the desperation of the situation, they were provided for, they could not possibly achieve this on their own; in the same way that they could not, and we cannot, achieve salvation without Christ. We are completely dependent on Jesus for salvation. We are asked to trust in Jesus completely, not just for some things but for all things: we are like children in that respect – completely dependent.

The difference between the Hebrews wandering in the wilderness and receiving manna from heaven and Jesus feeding of the five thousand is the abundance that Jesus gave. The Hebrews were given all they needed to survive, and it would have been possible for Jesus to do the same. Jesus could have just provided enough for those gathered to eat their fill, but he didn't. In his compassion and love for the people who had gathered to hear him speak he gave them more than they needed; the provision was so generous that

twelve baskets were filled with leftovers. The number twelve is significant from the point of view of salvation since the twelve tribes of Israel would be provided for and by extension the **whole of humanity** would be provided for. Again we see the parallel with the salvation of the people. Salvation is given generously, salvation is given abundantly, salvation is not held back.

Notice that in the account of the feeding of the five thousand there is no test of worthiness, no judgement as to who would get what; no means test as to whether a person might deserve to have a piece of fish or part of small bit of bread. All of the gathered people, five thousand men and many women and children as well, all of them deserved the grace and generosity of God through Jesus and so it is with salvation, all who ask for it receive God's great gift of salvation.

The other thing that we need to consider when we reflect upon this piece of scripture is the size of the gift that is brought and to think about it in terms of our own gifts. One of the things that we can take away, aside from the dependence on Jesus and the generous provision of salvation through Jesus, is that no matter how small the gift that we have to use is, it is always a great and useful gift in the eyes of the Lord; because those gifts that we are given are to be used, no matter how small they are, to show the glory of God to those around us. When we stand in the church and proclaim "We are the body of Christ" we are actually saying all that you give us Lord will be used for the work and **witness** of the church in the community. Through Christ the gifts are used in abundance. During the week in your reflections and prayers I ask to thank God for all the gifts you have both big and small, and pray that the gifts that you may see as insignificant, or so small that you can't see any way that

could have an impact, just like the loaves and fish, and ask that those gifts might be used, and used in abundance. Amen.