

Today we come to be part of one of Jesus miracles. I say be part of the miracle because as we see Jesus bless the loaves and the fishes, as God's people we can't just stand by. The miracle of the loaves and fishes is one of the better known of the gospel miracles; the loaves and fishes analogy is used often when there is a potential shortage of food, particularly in church kitchens! It is not an uncommon expression for us; but I think that we see what is going on here in a way that is a bit too leisurely.

There are in this gospel reading three groups who are part of the account: there are the disciples who, according to John, Jesus wants to test or Jesus wants to prove. There are crowds who have followed Jesus, to bring him their sick and suffering, and finally there is us who benefit too from the teaching of Jesus.

Throughout the scriptures we see who Jesus is, we see Jesus as the one who comes to teach of the relationship between God and humanity, we see Jesus heal the sick and the suffering, we see Jesus welcome the lonely and the outcast, and we see Jesus perform miracles for all to see; and it is through those miracles, like the one we hear today and others like turning water into wine at Cana, that we see the love and generosity of God. Ultimately,

we know Jesus as the one who would come among us and renew the relationship with God and humanity by destroying sin that separates us from God, and he does that through His death and resurrection.

The disciples knew in part who Jesus was, and in the last weeks we have heard that they went out to the villages and towns, spoke of repentance and healed the sick, they returned to Jesus to tell of all they had done. They were probably excited at the things they were able to do, they saw healing, they saw repentance, they saw people turn back to God from their sinfulness; but Jesus in this gospel shows them that the things they do, the things that they did, and the things they saw as they went about the region, they could not do on their own. He asks the disciples, and in John's gospel he specifically asks Philip, to feed the crowd. The crowd had been fed by Jesus spiritually but not yet physically; and Philip comes to a stark realisation that on his own he is unable to do as Jesus has asked. He can't feed the vast crowd on his own and he may not have realised it at this point, but Jesus has a plan. A plan of teaching the disciples that the things they did, they did not do on their own, and a plan of showing the grace of God as he feeds the crowd. John tells us that Jesus has a plan, he knew what he

was going to do, but the disciples didn't know it yet. Jesus knows that there isn't enough money to feed the people; but for Philip that is only way he could look at the problem. He and the other disciples would have to **buy** food, he, Philip, would have to be part of a transaction; he would have to **give** money to **receive** food. That is the key to Jesus teaching – Philip must **give** to **receive** and since he has nothing to give, the crowd would go hungry. For us that is important, we are tuned to only **receiving** if we **give** something, our lives are a continuous series of transactions, **giving** and **receiving**; in financial terms and in many ways in emotional terms. We understand fully the dilemma that Philip and the others face – the crowd will not be fed. Jesus is about to teach the disciples another lesson – a lesson about grace, the grace that we see through the cross, the grace that shows God's love and generosity, love and generosity that is, it would seem to some, undeserving. What human rules and regulations, that is the continuous transactions of giving and receiving, cannot achieve, God's grace can.

I said before that Jesus has a plan, John has said it in the gospel; because he knows that it is not possible for the disciples to buy food for the crowd; and even if they had six months wages

between them (although some other translations say eight months!) there may not have been enough food in town for them. So, Jesus takes something small, two barley loaves, like bread rolls, and some small fish. The picture we have is a small meal, a meal according to John that was only big enough for a child, it is a snack, and with that Jesus feeds them all. The crowd witnesses the grace that can only be given by God alone. The same grace that we see through the cross. Grace that shows God's love for all the people, because the people that are being fed by the loaves and fishes are symbolic of us all as we are fed by Christ as we share the Eucharist. The meal that the people shared was given to them generously, as is grace; and the meal that the people shared was given to them in such a way as they had to do nothing to receive it; they just had to be there. The crowd came seeking a little from Jesus, they came to hear him speak, they came to be healed and perhaps they had come to be renewed and spiritually fed; but they were given so much more. They were fed **generously** and that is the message that we take away today, that even though we live in a world that relies on continual transactions of giving before receiving, the life that Jesus gives is one of receiving continuously, in abundance, and what do we

have to do...nothing but turn up and trust in the promises of God as revealed through Jesus.

The disciples learnt that they could not achieve the things that they did without God, and so it is with us; but we know that we are given grace in abundance, and through that grace we are given gifts to be God's people.

We celebrate that grace through the sacrament of baptism, we celebrate that we are united with God and are made God's people, we celebrate in baptism that our shortcomings, our sins, are cleansed through the cross of Jesus, and that cleansing from sin is the ultimate act of grace from God. If we think in human terms about the feeding of the crowd, we might say that perhaps the crowd that gathered should have been more prepared to feed themselves; but remember that the crowd that came were the tired, the poor, the hungry, the sick and the suffering. Whatever their circumstances they are loved by God and given God's grace. So, it is with us, we come tired, poor, hungry, sick and suffering to receive and to celebrate the grace of God given in abundance. Amen.