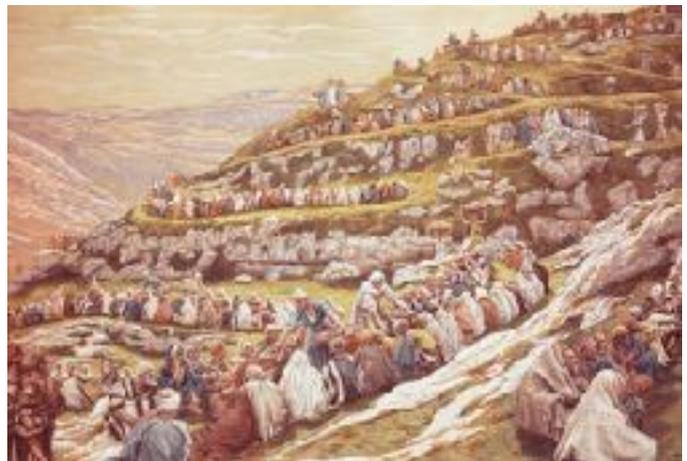


# Jesus Is the Messiah (not a bread king)

John 6:1-15

People who are famous or well known for one reason or another often say they don't have much privacy. Famous sports people, or television presenters, film stars, or sometimes even politicians, have crowds flocking after them, hoping to shake their hand or get a selfie with them. They can't go anywhere without someone recognizing them and wanting to talk to them.

It was like that with Jesus. There were always people following him. It was hard for him to get away and be by himself sometimes. In last week's Gospel we heard how he took his disciples away to a lonely place to get some rest by themselves. But the crowds recognized him and followed him. The same thing happened in today's reading. He crossed over to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee but again the crowds flocked after him. They had seen the miracles he had performed and so they flocked to him hoping for some sensational thing from him. He went up into the isolated hill country, but still the crowds followed. He could see that these people were hungry and that they were looking for something. And so he fed them with one little boy's lunch. They all ate in abundance – each person had as much as they wanted, and there was more left over when they finished than when they started.



As Jesus saw the crowds coming to him he asked Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" That is, where are we going to get enough food to feed them all? Philip did some quick mental calculations. Six months wages wouldn't even buy enough for each person to have even a bite. It was an enormous task. Andrew made the wry observation – "There's a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but how far will they go among so many?" It was pointless to pursue that line of thinking.



But Jesus took decisive action. He took what they had and made it go around abundantly. All 5,000 people had more than enough to eat from one little boy's lunch. What a miracle of multiplication! There was no need for the disciples to speculate how they could buy enough bread; Jesus had it all under control.

We are sometimes in a position like the disciples here. We worry and fret,

sometimes we are overwhelmed by the enormity of the situation before us. How can I achieve happiness, how can I be peaceful and calm when there is so much sadness in my life and in my family? How can I be joyful and optimistic when things around me in my life go bad? How can I trust God more fully when my health is on a steady decline? How can I succeed in that new task I've been asked to do when I think I have so little ability to do it? How will I be able to make ends meet? Will my superannuation last the distance? Will I always be able to pay the bills?

It takes faith to trust that God will provide. Jesus quietly went about multiplying the bread and the fish so that all had plenty to eat. Can't he do the same in our lives? Can't he take the little we have and multiply it so that there is more than sufficient? Jesus' question to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread?" was only to test him. Philip failed the test. He thought the situation depended on him and his resources. But Jesus himself knew all along what he would do – he would provide. If only we always had faith in God's abundant providing.



What this miracle story tells us is that God takes what we have and makes it sufficient for us, sometimes in ways we don't even imagine. He sometimes uses little insignificant things for his purposes. In this case a boy's lunch – five barley loaves and two fish – poor people's food – and turned it into a banquet for thousands.

It may be through some small kind deed of ours that he brings hope and comfort to someone. Perhaps it's a word we say that he can use. What we can do, our abilities or resources, often seems so inadequate and insignificant. But God can use the little we have and turn it into something great. Like the boy with the loaves and the fish we have to be prepared to hand over our little contribution and let him use it for his purposes.

That's the way he accomplished salvation for us by a death on a cross. What could have been more weak and inglorious than to suffer an unjust trial and then a degrading death like a criminal on a cross? Yet from such lowliness, from the stench of sweat and blood, he secured our salvation.

Sometimes God provides for us in ways we neither consider nor imagine. Often he doesn't give us the instant success we've been hoping for, but we are blessed in some other way. Sometimes our lives seem dry and barren, sometimes there is sickness and pain that won't go away, sometimes we are in situations we can't do anything about, yet God still provides a way out or around or through. Think of St. Paul with his thorn in the flesh. Three times he asked the Lord to remove it, but each time God said, "My grace is sufficient." And Paul was able to live with that weakness. Always God's grace is sufficient.

The point of this miracle was not so much the miracle itself, ie. not the providing of an instant free meal, not the instant solution to our physical needs, but it was a sign – and John in his Gospel always calls the miracles signs – this was a sign that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God. And if he is the Son of God then he can take care of all of our needs, not just the physical. The crowd simply took him to be someone who would look after their physical needs. For them he was a bread king. They wanted to take him by force and make him their king. If he could perform such miracles he would be great to have as their king.

But Jesus would have none of it. He quickly withdrew from the crowds. Jesus did not come just to fill empty stomachs. He is not there to provide quick and easy solutions to our everyday desires.

He's not a bread king. Following Jesus doesn't ensure us an easy and comfortable passage through life. He doesn't offer physical comfort, in fact the reverse. Jesus said if you want to follow me you must deny yourself and take up your cross.

But Jesus does take care of our deeper needs:

- our need for forgiveness
- our need for courage to face whatever life may bring
- our need for hope for the future
- our need for wholeness in ourselves and in our relationship with others.

In today's Gospel reading he did it by distributing bread and fish. For us today he does it by distributing bread and wine in Holy Communion. Here we receive the bread of life. Here we are given forgiveness and courage, and hope, and wholeness, not in meagre quantities but in abundance, so much so that there are baskets full left over.

In Christ we have an abundance. He can take what little we have and provide for us, not necessarily in a physical sense – remember he is not a bread king – but he's our Messiah, our Saviour who gives us fullness of life, and peace, and forgiveness, and his love and healing. With Christ life is always abundant, always rich and full. So let's be like the boy in the story and hand over what we have and let Christ bless us abundantly. Amen.

