

Sermon for Trinity 8 – 2nd August 2020. Matthew 14: 13-21

In today's reading we hear about one of Jesus' miracles, usually referred to as "Feeding the Five Thousand". We hear how he provided food for a very large crowd from only five loaves and two fishes. This miracle appears in all four gospels. In fact, Mark's Gospel includes a second "feeding" miracle, on this occasion feeding four thousand people with seven loaves and "a few small fishes." Each of the gospel writers puts a slightly different slant on their account but the fact that all four include this miracle is testimony to the importance that they attached to it. The question I want to think about this morning is "why was this miracle about Jesus providing a meal for thousands of people so important to the Gospel-writers?"

Well, Jesus often spoke about the kingdom of God in terms of a banquet and this was not an idea unique to Jesus. At the time there was a general expectation that the last days, the end of time, would be ushered in with a magnificent feast where God's people would share in the blessings of the new age. It's an idea inspired by the Jewish scriptures (our Old Testament). Isaiah writes that the Lord will make for all peoples a feast of rich foods and well matured wines. That he will destroy the shroud that is cast over all peoples. And that the Lord God will swallow up death for ever, will wipe away the tears from all faces and take away the disgrace of his people from all the earth.

So when the crowd witnessed this miraculous meal many would have understood Jesus to be the Messiah who was bringing in the kingdom of God.

Jesus also used this miracle to demonstrate who would be welcome into this kingdom of his. In Jesus' day great significance was given to who you ate with. The Jews believed that you should only share a meal with people you felt were acceptable to God. That is why the Pharisees were scandalised by Jesus' habit of eating with tax collectors and sinners. They thought that these were people whose behaviour excluded them from God's family. But, throughout his ministry, Jesus made it very clear that the kingdom of God isn't like that and he makes it clear once again in this miracle. It shows us that Jesus was generous and inclusive about those with whom he shared a meal, and so, by implication, generous about who he believed could be part of God's kingdom. Of the five thousand men, not to mention the women and children who were there, nobody was excluded. The food was blessed and passed around to everybody. In fact, the amounts left over reflect the abundance and sufficiency of God's grace.

Jesus was not simply feeding a hungry crowd. He was ushering in the age of the Messiah and showing that **all** were welcome into the kingdom

of God. Now, I think it's unlikely that everyone who shared this meal would have become his followers. Some may even have gone on to shout for his crucifixion, but that did not stop Jesus opening his arms to each and every one of them.

The life and ministry of Jesus leave us no doubt that he was inclusive, loving those that society rejected and demonstrating a powerful forgiveness that made a fresh start possible for even the most unlikely of candidates. Jesus sets the example for us, his followers today, both as individuals and as churches. Do we welcome everybody? Do we demonstrate Jesus' love for people of all ages and all backgrounds? Are we prepared to change how we do things to make it easier for new people to feel welcome amongst us? Let us pray that the Lord will help us to follow his example so that the unconditional love demonstrated to thousands of people through those five loaves and two fish may be made known through us too.