

Lyn Valley Mission Community

Trinity 8

2 Kings 4:42-end Psalm 145:10-19 Ephesians 3:14-end John
6:1-21

In speaking and listening, writing and reading, may God be known, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

This week, it has been a great delight for me to join the year six children from the schools in Lynton and Parracombe for their Leavers' Services. With family and teachers we were able to help them mark this milestone in their own lives – the end of primary school years and the anticipation of secondary school to come. I have now been here long enough to remember these classes when they were early in their school life here and it is a testimony to their families, the school environment and their own characters that they have matured into very thoughtful and resourceful young people, who will carry positive things into their new environment in the autumn.

It is perhaps spending time in their company this week that focused my attention on the “boy” in the midst of our gospel story today, who, though unnamed, played a pivotal role in this remarkable miracle. Though this story is told in each gospel, only John mentions this boy who supplied the loaves and the fish, with which Jesus works his feeding miracle. This child offers the disciples the key to solving the problem with which Jesus has presented them.

Jesus asks: “Where are we going to buy food for these people to eat?” He is setting out the expectation that their mission is to offer food to the crowd who have followed them.

Philip, who seems to have a practical and mathematical mind, highlights that even before “where to buy bread” comes “with what are we going to buy bread” – he calculates it would take six months wages. This gives a sense of perspective, there is a huge need, and clearly Philip is overwhelmed by the gap between the need and their resources. You can almost hear the inner voice in his head: “lovely idea to offer them something to eat, but we just don't have the capacity. Even if there was somewhere we bread for sale we cannot afford it”.

Andrew, brings forward an alternative perspective – a different approach, perhaps inspired by the child.

My experience of working with children of the kind of age that is old enough to have been given supplies and allowed to go off for the day to see this new preacher in town and yet young enough still to be called a boy, is that they are pretty good at taking an original view of a situation and they are often tenacious problem solvers – ingenious in the solutions they offer for tricky situations, which are either way off, or remarkably spot on. I don't know if those of you with children and grandchildren recognise this trait? "What if we do this.....? A quality of hopeful confidence in what might be possible, undiminished by the cynicism of later years.

This boy's offering seems to me to come from that kind of naïve optimism: the grown ups are talking about feeding people and I have some food, what if we use this?

Well done Andrew, I say, for not dismissing that naivety, even if he is very unsure about bringing the meagre offerings forward as part of such a great task. Is his inner voice saying "lovely idea to offer them something to eat, we've got something to start with, but its nothing like enough to make a dent in people's hunger"?

For Jesus, it is enough, the beginning of a response to his question, a willingness to engage with his expectation of the kind of mission they are on, even tentatively. It is interesting that in other teaching he talks of the need to become like a child in order to receive the Kingdom of God: perhaps being willing to adopt the wise naivety that hopes all things and believes all things are possible. Here it is the child at the centre who opens the way for Jesus' fulfilment of the mission.

He takes the bread, gives thanks, and distributes it – the actions that we repeat in his name week by week in our Eucharist.

All five thousand eat until they are satisfied, and twelve baskets of fragments are gathered: more left over than they started with.

And the crowd recognise him as a prophet, as one who has given them a sign.

Over the next few Sundays our gospel readings will hold us with this "sign" and help us see what it points back to and how it points forward to the gift of Jesus' life sustaining us. Jesus offers an extended reflection

on the “bread” which centres the significance of this feeding on the relationship with him offered by sharing the bread he gives. This is about so much more than him offering people a meal – it is about showing them true nourishment.

His first question in today’s reading is

“Where are we going to buy food for these people to eat?” and Philip wonders: it will cost six month’s wages.

The exchange reminds me of the beautiful passage in Isaiah:

“Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy. Listen carefully to me and eat what is good and delight yourselves in rich food”

God seeks to teach those he loves a new economy – finding true worth in what is God’s gift, and satisfaction in receiving more than can ever be bargained over.

The boy offering his five loaves and the two fish as a first response to Jesus’ question shows a similar grasp of a different economy: what happens if I give you what I have? What if we try this?

The miracle happens, but Jesus’ purpose is greater than feeding the group – it is about people finding the new way of seeing the world that he is revealing, with the kind of wise naivety that many children have, but the world can educate out of us. The child saw the man of God who needed some food to feed people so he shared his, in contrast the crowd saw a miracle worker who they wanted to make king. The child saw, with something like Jesus’ compassion, how he could contribute to an inspiring aim to feed the hungry; the crowd wanted to harness Jesus’ power for their own benefit. Jesus disappears from their sight.

Who do we see when we look at Jesus?

Can we see him through the eyes of the child, as the one who draws from us our deepest enthusiasm to share what he is doing, and our fullest generosity in sharing what we have?

Lord Jesus,

Give us the inner vision to see the way you see,

Draw us into your companionship,

Show us what we have to offer to share in the nourishment you bring to our world

Give us the grace respond to your promptings with hopeful confidence.

Amen