

Wherever Jesus went,
the crowds followed,
because they knew that He would feed them
in body, mind, and spirit.

May we gather friends too because we are known to be kind and generous.

But also remember that even though
He found it difficult to have time on his own,
He knew how important it was to have space
to recharge when we are tired.

Yesterday Video of the Moderator of the General Assembly at top of Munro.
Camping, Rowing, Climbing, Physically Exhausted but Inwardly Renewed.
As we tire of this pandemic, and worry about what the future may hold,
As we hold tight to those we love, and consider how to be sure we all are refreshed for the way
ahead,,
Physically and spiritually, Emotionally and Mentally
May Jesus guide us to do what he did,
to always see possibility and potential, and to enhance the gifts of others,
sharing what we have and being glad of all that others bring,
Caring for others, but also Caring for ourselves
So may we love and serve him in all things.

Reflection

In the collection of parables revealing a number of different facets of the Kingdom of Heaven that we shared a fortnight ago,
we were invited to accept that Jesus knew
what he was talking about and thus to enter with him into the journey
that leads to the building of that Kingdom in the here and now.
In the verses between those parables and the familiar story
of the feeding of the multitude we will hear today,
Jesus had some tough news –
his cousin had John the Baptist been murdered by Herod,
his head presented at a banquet on “a silver platter.”
His untimely death a result borne out of fear that John may have led a revolt against the powerful,
Best described under the headline The Empire strikes back.
When Jesus heard the news that his cousin had been killed:
he wanted time to be alone,
he wanted space to mourn,
but everyone wanted a piece of him.
In times like this, we all need this,
Sometimes it hard, with arrangements to be made,
And family to care for, especially when unexpected.
We see the headline, and react with all of the emotions of grief.
However, it is also important to remember that others
may be feeling the same.
Grief is unpredictable, but not insurmountable.
It takes time to process, sometimes a long time.
And given the uncertain times we are living in,
And the unresolved grief many will feel,
this might be much longer and more complicated than usual.
And that's tiring, it's strange, and it's tough.

But, as the beautiful service for George showed on Friday,
Sometimes it allows for a different kind of farewell,
Which is that bit more personal and private.
And sometimes that's just what is needed,
As Jesus found in these tragic circumstances.
Often we do not know the back story.
We only know our needs, and our wants.
And, if nothing else, I hope this time of isolation
And social distancing, has helped us to realise,
That we are not a world unto ourselves.
That we are part of a wonderful community of saints,
Who are called to care for each other,
To reach out to each other,
To seek to understand each other's fears and hopes,
And to allow each other the space and the time to
Deal with life and loss, with death and fear,
In our own way.

May we have compassion:
for all the back stories,
that we might never hear,
and may we tread cautiously
in our encounters with others,
allowing for the possibility
that we tread on broken dreams,
and shattered hope,
and undetermined fears.

May we be gentle,
may we be kind,
making space for one another.

Prayer

God of miracle and God of everyday, may we see you now:
healing, feeding, teaching, serving, through ordinary people,
whom you call to be your body in the world today.
We thank you that you reveal your love in those around us,
and that you even enable us to step up to be Christ for one another.
Lord, forgive us
for the times we cannot be bothered,
the times we look to our own comfort first,
and forget that your command is to love one another.
Forgive us and help us to do better.
God, in Jesus you gave us a perfect example.
May we keep on learning from him,
and may we become imitators of him,
until we too are sought out by others,
as people of peace and of love in the name of God, who is love,
and whose Son Jesus lived this earthly life and
understands our hopes and fears,
and who taught us to pray together, saying

Lord's Prayer

Gospel Reading

Matthew 14:13-21

Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand

¹³ When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴ When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

¹⁵ As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food."

¹⁶ Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."

¹⁷ "We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered.

¹⁸ "Bring them here to me," he said. ¹⁹ And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. ²⁰ They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. ²¹ The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Prayer

In grief at the news of his cousin's death,
though it could hardly have come as a surprise to him,
given the times they were living in,
Jesus seeks time away from the crowd
and ventures by boat away to a deserted place.
The tension and division between the
itinerant prophetic and healing ministries of John and Jesus
as it is contrasted with the power and authority of Herod
and his overlords from Rome is ratcheted up
another step in this chapter.

Matthew juxtaposes the sumptuous birthday feast
of Herod culminating in John's head being presented
to Herodias's daughter on a platter
with the massed hungry crowds
following Jesus into the wilderness and needing sustenance.

That sustenance is provided by Jesus.
After a series of parables about the Kingdom of Heaven,
here we have an enacted parable.

The Kingdom priority towards the sick, the poor, and the hungry is made real as Jesus first heals
those amongst the crowd

who are unwell and then overrules the request of the disciples,
as dusk falls, to send the crowd away,
instead commanding his disciples to give them something to eat.
And even in these uncertain times, I assure you that,
when it comes to feeding other people,

where this is a will there is a way.
Church and community groups up and down the country are
Going above and beyond to be certain that no one goes hungry.
The hospitality industry has completely reinvented themselves,
With deliveries, collections and new set ups
allowing people to go out safely, or indeed to stay in.
Establishments working so hard to make this happen,
And even the government providing the stimulus
to encourage us to eat out and help out.
Packed school lunches are being planned for every child,
Regardless of their circumstances,
And families and friends are gathering socially distanced
to share BBQ's and Picnics outdoors as soon
as it is safe for them to do so.
It's not about the excess it once was, these times are cherished.
The commissioning of the disciples to enter into co-ministry
with Jesus is given a dramatic push in this story.
They cannot feed the multitude without Jesus' action amongst them,
but Jesus also draws them into that action.
They provide the initial food of five loaves and two fish,
and then they go out to share the food with the crowd
after Jesus has blessed it.
The royal feast in the Herodian palace ends, one imagines,
in a debauched frenzy as a bloody platter is displayed
for all to see, or, one might hope, in an uneasy silence
as the platter makes its way through the tables,
the music and dancing coming to a halt as the gravity
of what had happened to John is realized.
I heard a heart wrenching deathbed confession of a man
In the States who realised he shouldn't have gone to a mass
gathering and wished he hadn't, just days before he died of Covid.
And part of me wonders if the same thing happened the morning
after the night out in the pub in Aberdeen,
which has led to the city being locked down again.
I am slowly returning to the idea of Everything in Moderation,
But even that feels different, hoping that we can all
Remember and celebrate the lives of those no longer with us,
And share in a great feast as the people on hillside did.
When, out in the wilderness, the most humble of basic foods
was shared amongst the crowd in an atmosphere of joyous thankfulness:
that the hungry are fed, the sick are cured, and the Kingdom of Heaven becomes real for us all as it
did for these people
in that time and place.
The political alternative to blood lust, greed,
and power is revealed in the wilderness as compassion, generosity
and a sharing in the good harvest provided by the land and sea.
Injustice has its home in Herod's lush palace,
while justice is found in the parched wilderness,
ignored by the powerful elites on the safety of their thrones.
And I hope we can share together in the bounty of
that harvest very soon.

When we celebrate the Sacrament of Communion
in most churches it is a very simple, sparse meal indeed.
Yet it is a meal that overflows with meaning, invitation, and abundant grace. That meal, as with the simple meal offered
in the wilderness, reminds us that our definition of “plenty”
is governed much by our society’s expectations.
How many meals have we had at restaurants where the merit
of the meal is measured in quantity rather than quality;
and our plates are gathered up at the end still piled
with food to discard?
How do we talk about generosity and abundance in our world when our society values excess and the huge wastage that results from it?
How do we re-frame our understanding of the justice of abundant food for all, for the whole multitude and not just the select few,
in today’s world where so many struggle to know
what it is to have one’s hunger satisfied?
There is a real effort by some to frame the future in a new way,
which allows us to do this as we begin to discover a “new normal”.
What if greed and power and violence
were not given the headlines?
What if, instead good stewardship, and humble service, and fair and equal treatment became hallmarks of the way forward?
What if we all have a greater understanding of each other’s hopes and fears,
and can live together in greater harmony together as a result?
What if?

Prayer

God,
when we are frightened,
give us courage;
when we are disturbed,
bring us calm;
when we sit in darkness,
show us the beginnings of dawn;
when we want to retreat and be quiet,
nudge us back to bring life to others;
when we are tempted to hoard what we have,
open our hands to share.

God,
again and again remind us that we have power:
power to heal the earth and its people.

May we use that power
in love and service as Christ showed us.

Lord,
surprise us with glimpses of you at work around us,
making all things new.

May we yearn to be a part of that, working alongside you,
to heal creation with you,
God of the universe.

May we seek to understand the needs of our neighbours
And the roots of our divisions,

To unite communities for the future.
May we relearn the ways of justice and kindness and mercy,
That all may know your unconditional love.
Be with all of those who are part of this plan,
Renew their strength, give them courage, and remind us to be gentle and encouraging as we return
to daily routines.
Protect our teachers, our service providers, our frontline workers,
And help us all to consider how we can help those who have faced loss of jobs, or grief, or worry, or
isolation, or vast changes in the way they live and work and provide for their family
to be renewed in spirit,
As we look forward in faith and hope.

And now may the peace which surpasses all our human understanding keep guard over our hearts
and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord, and
May the Blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
Be with each one of you and all whom you love and care about today and always.

Amen.