



**KIAMA
ANGLICAN
CHURCHES**

Fish & Bread for All!

Sermon – Andrew McPhail, 21 March 2021

Matthew 14:13-21

Jesus feeds the 5000

This miracle of Jesus, recorded in all four gospels, is when Jesus is at his most popular. This miracle had a clear message for the crowd, for his disciples, and there is a message for us today.

Lord may we have ears to hear and hearts to follow the Son of Man, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who we meet today in the words of Matthew's Gospel and in the living Word through the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is looking for a quiet place to spend time in prayer and with his close disciples. He's found out that Herod Antipas, the Roman ruler of the Galilee region, is looking for him. There's a guilty fear in Herod's interest; he had Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist beheaded, and now is worried that John has come back to life. With all the stories of a Prophet in town who heals the sick and speaks with power, Herod tries to see Jesus.

It looks like a political move, and Jesus wants none of it.

So Jesus pulls up stumps and heads off in the fishing boat to a lonely place. Word is spreading fast – there's a Prophet in town! Could it be John? Could it be Elijah, or could it even be the prophet everyone was looking for, hoping for, who Moses wrote about in Deuteronomy chapter 18!

Social media is running hot, word spreads like wildfire and the crowds that had been building over the preceding months are dropping everything to find him and get in on the action.

It seems like there's a groundswell of expectation, a longing for release from oppression, an overwhelming need...for something good to hear...for something good to see...for something good to feel.

But Jesus looks for a lonely place, just with his close friends. Popularity is not his main thing. What is it? It's the Kingdom of God. His Father. And Herod is not going to spring popularity on him, neither is the crowd.

Notice – Jesus is not looking for an audience, not looking for fame, not looking for popularity. He's looking for disciples, for followers, for sheep who need a shepherd. He's bringing in the kingdom of God.

Jesus looks for a lonely place. A place to himself and his close disciples. And so Matthew simply writes in verse 13 that the crowds found out and followed him on foot from the towns.

These crowds – we've met them before - from Capernaum, from Korazin, from Bethsaida, small towns in Galilee. No more than a few thousand people in each.

Jesus began his ministry here – from Matthew 4. After his temptation in the desert, when he had heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake.

What's special about these people? About this place? It's foretold. Matthew 4:15, quoted from Isaiah 9:

“Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles – the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the shadow of death a light has dawned.”

We meet the crowd again in the end of chapter 4:

“Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.”

...and again in chapter 9:

“Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing

every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

...and the crowd is there when Jesus lands. Think about the scene for a moment. It is quite remarkable! Here's a crowd as big as you'll see at an NRL match on Sunday arvo at WIN Stadium. Here's a mum with a sick child...a dad with a wife who is wracked by pain...a daughter with a crippled brother...a few mates who are sick and tired of the Romans ruling their land...an old Jewish man looking for the Prophet who will come and save.

There's the curious, the desperate, the thrill seekers and the faith seekers. There's a surge and an energy and a hope and a longing. All looking to one man, getting out of a boat, who sees them and groans inside with a deep compassion – like a knot in his stomach, an ache of love for a crowd like sheep without a shepherd. It's not a groan of frustration, or tiredness. It's not Jesus saying 'not again? Can't they just leave me alone?' It's a response to the effect of sin, the soul hunger of the world, the brokenness of people.

And so Matthew again puts it simply – “he healed their sick”. Does this not amaze you? One man, over 10000 people, one day, out in the countryside. He does not stop. He teaches them about the Kingdom of God, he heals, he drives out evil spirits, he meets their needs.

Would you have been there?

Who would you have taken with you?

What would you have wanted from Jesus?

And then it's afternoon. The disciples have got it all worked out – “Jesus, we've got a problem. They're hungry. There's no food. We think they'll turn from a crowd to a mob.”

...We'll come back to the conversation with the disciples in a moment... but for now, we'll focus on the big miracle!

Jesus does something that defies the laws of nature. He takes a small amount enough for one person, and creates enough to feed everyone, and they were all satisfied. This is not a trick, not the powers of suggestion so that the crowd started to share their own food with others.

Why this miracle? 3 reasons:

It is Jesus claiming his creation power.

‘Through him all things were made: without him nothing was made that has been made...’

‘...for by him all things were created; things in heaven and on earth...all things were created by him and for him.’

This by itself is enough to point the crowd to his divinity – he is from God, and he is God.

But there’s more for the crowd. He’s feeding them, meeting their daily need for bread. He takes up the theme of Moses in the wilderness who had God say to him, ‘I will rain down bread from heaven for you’ and each morning the manna appeared and the Israelites were satisfied.

He’s feeding all of them, not just the righteous, or the good soil, or the good fish of the parables. He is gracious, kind, compassionate. He sees them torn and broken, under the curse of sin, the oppression of Satan, and the bondage to religion.

He is being the living bread, the ‘I am’ statement in John chapter 6v35.

“Then Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.’

Thirdly, he’s guiding them, and teaching them and healing them. The prophecy of Micah 5v2-5 is fulfilled right here, by the lake,

‘...but you, Bethlehem, Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will rule over Israel, whose origins are of old, from ancient times.

v3 (Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor gives birth and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites.)

He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be their peace.'

For those in the crowd who had been there for Jesus' sermon on the mount, for his healing of the lepers, the centurion's servant, and the man with the withered hand...for those in the crowd who heard him claim to be Lord of the Sabbath...for those who took seriously his parables...this could be the Messiah!

And that's why Jesus feeds the 5000 – **because he is from God and is God**. And this is who God is...compassionate, gracious, powerful and kind.

Creation Power

Bread of Life

Messiah of God

Does the crowd get it? Perhaps some do, but from this point Jesus's popularity takes a turn for the worse. The rally is over, the placards are put away, the followers find other causes, and Jesus sets his face to Jerusalem.

John puts it this way in chapter 6:

'After the people saw the miraculous sign Jesus did, they began to say, "Surely this is the prophet who is come into the world!" Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.'

For the crowd to be truly rescued, healed and restored, he could not be their earthly king. He had to be their living, dying and rising again saviour. And that time was not yet. He could not stay in Galilee, healing and teaching and feeding. Jesus is not just a great teacher, a worker of

miracles, a provider of food. He must do what his Father asks of him. He must walk to Jerusalem, to his trial, to his death, to his resurrection. It's easy to be hard on the disciples. But I think this miracle is for them just as much as for the crowd. Matthew leaves out the comments on cost – 8 months wages! Or who found the food – Andrew and the small boy. But the dilemma is just as real.

They are practical men – and they see the crowd in a practical way. Their faith is real and they are committed to their Lord, but now the day is late and the crowd is hungry.

'Send them away Lord.' Save your energy for another day.

But Jesus turns the problem back to them

'You give them something to eat.'

Is it a test? What is Jesus looking for? Even though they do find some food, it is so ridiculously inadequate that I am sure Jesus smiles at their attempt. But it may be a mustard seed of faith, a handful of yeast in a crowd this big. The disciples know that Jesus is from God – they've heard him say this, and seen him prove this. They know the cost of following him.

They also have been given power to minister in his name –

10v1: 'He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease.'

and *10v40: 'He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me.'*

So here they are, trusting, perplexed and wondering how on earth to please their Lord.

So they get the job of serving the crowd. Jesus does the miracle, and they work for Jesus. And in the end, they get their own lunch basket filled up – all twelve of them. Jesus is saying,

'If you follow me, and serve in my name, you can trust in my power, my compassion, my grace. I will look after you too. After all, I'm your messiah, your saviour, your friend.'

But they still have some big lessons to learn – on the lake, later that night, in the upper room, during Jesus' trial, at the tomb.

What does this account in Matthew's gospel say to us?

Jesus is not looking for an audience, not looking for fame, not looking for popularity.

He's looking for disciples, for followers, for sheep who need a shepherd
He's looking for us.

Can you say Amen to the creation power of Jesus? Do you believe he is before all time, that he is from God and is God? Do you bank your life on his power to heal, to make new, to rule?

Can you say Amen to the never running out, basket overflowing, always available love of Jesus? Do you wake each morning to thank him for your daily bread, for his love that reaches to the heavens and is there for you, just you, every moment?

Can you say Amen to the saving grace of God in his Son, Jesus? Have you turned from sin and self-centredness to repent, and claim Jesus as the only way to knowing God?

Then you are a follower, one of whom Jesus says,

'For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.'

The crowds looked to the Son and were fed, healed and taught.

The disciples served the Son and were blessed.

We who believe in the Son have life that is filled up today and assured for the future. Are you thankful? Then let him be your treasure, your hope, your daily bread.

Follow the king, Jesus of the greatest miracle – not of feeding such a great crowd on a hillside in Galilee, but of changing someone like me and you from self-centred to God-centred, from darkness to light, from death to life. That's the big miracle!