

Address on 2nd August 2020 – Lessons from Mark's gospel, week 6

Contributing what we have The feeding of the 5,000 – Mark6:30-44

Introduction

Possibly the oldest joke I have ever come across dates from the 16th Century. A curate was preaching to his parishioners and said that our Lord with 5 loaves and 2 fish had fed 500 people. The clerk, hearing his mistake, whispered softly in his ear, "Sir, ye err, the gospel is 5,000." "Hold thy peace fool" replied the curate, "they will scarcely believe 500."

Well I wonder what you make of the feeding of the 5,000

Background

The story begins with Jesus looking for some peace and quiet. We all need peace and quiet from time to time to rest and 'recharge our batteries'. In clergy circles I have heard it said that we need to learn to come apart so that we don't fall apart. In lockdown, however, for many there has been too much peace and quiet. We have realised how much we need others in our lives, how important human interaction is. And so we need to keep praying that this virus can be overcome and keep on keeping a look out for our neighbours, especially those who are vulnerable or housebound.

Jesus and his disciples decided to take a boat across the lake. I have never been to Galilee but apparently the lake is about 4 miles across or 12 miles in circumference so it must have been quite a surprise when they landed to find that the crowds had hurried round on foot to hear more from Jesus. But tired though he was Jesus didn't send them away. Rather, he had compassion on them and began to teach them once again.

Then as the day drew on the disciples came to him. "Lord, it is getting late. Send the people away so that they can get something to eat." This would have seemed to them a sensible thing to do but Jesus had other ideas. "You give them something to eat," he said.

"But that would take half a year's wages" they protested "and where are we going to find enough food?"

"How much bread do you have" Jesus replied, "go and see."

Now in Mark's gospel he doesn't actually mention the little boy but we know from John's gospel that what happened next was that they found a little boy who was willing to give up his packed lunch, 5 barley loaves and two small fish.

Jesus told his disciples to sit the people down and then he took the loaves and the fish and having given thanks for them he began to break them and give them to the disciples to pass on to the people. And he went on breaking them and they went on giving them out until everyone had had their fill.

What's more when everyone had finished eating the disciples collected 12 basketfuls of leftovers!

Lessons

Well, what lessons do we learn from the feeding of the 5,000? There are two things that I want to put to you this morning. The first is that it tells us something about Jesus. The second is, that it tells something about ourselves.

Jesus

When I was looking for a picture to put on the service sheet today I found a great cartoon which pictured a fishmongers stall and chalked on the board was a sign which said 'buy 2, get 5,000.' Unfortunately, it was copyrighted so I didn't feel I could use it. But that is exactly what Jesus did isn't

it? From two fish he produced enough fish to feed 5,000 people, from five loaves he produced enough bread for 5,000 people.

What do you think the people would have made of this miracle? You can imagine the buzz of excitement that must have passed through the crowd as the message is sent back from those at the front:, “he just keeps breaking the bread and the fish, and the more he breaks it the more there is!”

How well do you know your Old Testament? It’s sometimes true that to really understand the New Testament we need to know our Old Testament. And I think that may be true here. Do you remember the story of the Israelites wandering in the desert? For forty years they wandered in the desert and for forty years God fed them with manna, bread from heaven. But eventually they crossed the Jordan into the promised land and the bible says they ate the produce of the land. From that day the manna stopped. The rabbis said however that when the Messiah came he would bring again manna from heaven. I wonder if the people there that day had this thought in their minds as they saw Jesus produce bread from heaven. Did they make the connection?

Certainly, no-one can feed 5,000 this way unless he is the creator himself. I have heard it said that what Jesus did was to get everyone to sit down and share what they had with each other. That would have been a miracle of sorts but that isn’t what the scriptures say. This miracle tells us something about Jesus. It tells us that he was the Messiah, the Son of God.

Ourselves

This miracle also tells us something about ourselves. In this miracle there is a sub-text and it’s about us working together with God. When the disciples come to Jesus with their problem he says to them, “what do you have?” “Five loaves and two fish” they say. Does Jesus say, “that’s no good”? No! He says bring what you’ve got. And I think that if this miracle teaches us anything it teaches us that God wants us to offer what we have, however small and insignificant that may seem to us. He doesn’t ask us to give what we don’t have but he does ask us to give what we do have.

And the great thing is that God can then take it and use it to great effect. The boy in this story can’t have thought that his loaves and fish were really worth offering. The disciples didn’t seem to think they were. But with this small offering Jesus was able to do great things.

And that’s why I called this week’s session ‘Contributing what we have’ because I believe this miracle, as well as teaching us who Jesus is, tells us something about ourselves, that we all have something to give and that if we will only offer what we have then God can take it and use it.

William Barclay put it like this: ‘Little is much when God is in it.’

Summary

So I want to encourage you as you ponder this miracle to ask what might God be calling you to give? It could be money, It could be time. It could be something practical. It could be friendship. It could be something inside the church, like helping with our worship. It could be something outside the church.

We all have a part to play and even if we thought we had nothing of worth to give, this parable shows us something different. We all have something to give and however small it may seem to us, God can use it.

Prayer

Lord you took 5 loaves and 2 fish and fed 5,000 people. Help us to offer what we have in your service that you may do great things in and through us. Amen

Anthony Smith