

**Notes from Sermon given by Ian Stackhouse - Sunday November 18th 2007
Matthew 14:13-21 The feeding of the 5000.**

This is a very familiar Bible story – indeed it has become part of our basic knowledge and our vocabulary. But what is not so obvious is that at that time, Jesus was, after John the Baptist's beheading, in the very early stages of grief. So much so that he had been trying to get away to be alone to mourn, only to find that the crowds had followed him and brought him all their sick. Whenever we need space, by contrast and we are interrupted, initially our heart sinks and we wonder 'Is there no escape?'

Jesus' heart is immediately filled with compassion. So often our personal grief or hurt can be a powerful motivation for reaching into the lives of others. 'Comforting others with the comfort we ourselves have received.'

Anyway in this incident the crowds had been there all day and into the early evening and the disciples were becoming anxious about the people's hunger. They were quite cross with Jesus as if He has forgotten their natural needs in His concern for their supernatural needs, no to mention the disciples' own need for space. Their reply to Jesus' suggestion that they give them something to eat with five loaves and two fish is rather sarcastic. They illustrate the third seed of the parable of the sower because they had taken into their hearts the Word that makes all things possible, but the anxiety chokes the Word. Their realism is choking the sense of the Reality that is Jesus.

Ian then gave an illustration from his trip to Pakistan where he had been asked to turn up at a meeting with 10 minutes' notice. They prayed, but he didn't feel he had much of a message. But God takes these natural things when we offer them to Jesus and He transforms it, and thus people at this meeting were overwhelmed by the Spirit. Jesus looks up to heaven, blesses the five loaves and two fish and it is distributed to the crowd who ate their fill and had twelve basketsful left over. Jesus fed their bodies as well as their souls. In contrast to Herod's banquet which was all about pride sensuality and even murder, we have Jesus' banquet which is all about trust, healing and sharing – not in a palace but in a desert place.

So are we like the wilderness generation who asked in Psalm 78 'Can God spread a table in the wilderness?' or will we trust that however meagre our resources God is able to do far more than we can possibly ask or imagine. Will we apply reason or science and say 'this is not possible' or will we have faith, push out of our comfort zone and trust that we can rest upon him, Jesus, the Son of God. The Christian faith is nothing if it is not supernatural; if it just to count to 7 (5 loaves and 2 fish); it is nothing if Jesus is not risen, active and doing things.

The blessing of visiting the developing world is that this makes sense, where it doesn't in the materialist west. Christians are challenging the authorities and on occasions this leads to beheading; where daily bread really does matter; where people have to trust God for things because they don't have the resources in any real natural sense.

Who are your 5000? Who is God calling you to feed? Where is the place that God has called you to get involved? He will take whatever you offer Him, and He has the power to multiply it.

Here at Communion we have ordinary bread, we are fed and sustained by it on our journey. It's not much but it is the most relevant thing we can do as we re-connect and re-member the event that makes the whole world make sense. We find life and strength in the Son of God before we go out into the world to heal the broken-hearted of the world.