

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
02/08/2020
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Genesis 32: 22-31	Jacob wrestles with God
Psalms 17: 1-6, 16	Hear me Lord, because I follow you
Romans 9: 1-8	Jesus came through Israel, but those of the promise Can become God's Children
Matthew 14: 13-21	Jesus feeds 5000

Introduction

Today as we look at the Gospel reading, I would like to look at two aspects. Firstly, how Jesus goes to a solitary place to be with God the Father, and secondly how Jesus then goes on to feed more than 5000 people.

Jesus in a Solitary Place

Throughout Matthew's Gospel we hear how Jesus goes off to be alone. Today we hear how he actually took a boat to try to escape the crowds. We hear of Jesus going off alone, and he was in a physical sense, but not in a spiritual sense. He was going off to pray, to actually be with God the Father. Because this is mentioned so often in the gospels, it seems to me that this was a practice Jesus felt was very necessary for him to carry out his ministry, otherwise why would he be so persistent about doing it. And if it was important for Jesus to take time out alone to pray, to be with God the Father, then how much more important might it be for us to do so.

We need to take time out for ourselves to be with God. Sometimes very active people think it is a waste of time to not really be doing anything, but this could not be further from the truth. At a Diocesan Conference I attended whilst in Brisbane, one of the speakers talked about how the brain is most active when it is in a meditative state. It is when we are in a meditative or prayerful state that our minds can do their best work. It is at this time when our best ideas or plans can develop. The best selling book "Too busy not to pray", hits the nail right on the head. The busier we are, the more we need to take time to be in tune with God.

It's very important for our spiritual lives that we develop regular prayer time. This will differ for different people, as we are all individuals, but we need to set aside

time to be with God. Morning people might pray best in the morning, whereas others might pray better as they are going to bed at night. A mother with a small child might find time during the middle of the day.

Taking time out for ourselves to be with God is a good and important thing, but we must be careful not to be so inwardly focused that we avoid all else. We live in a society which is very self centered. I was watching one of the kids shows on TV the other afternoon and the presenter was telling the kids how important it was to have “me time”. Time you just devote to yourself. He went through a list of do’s and don’ts to ensure quality “me time”. I must say I found this a little bit disturbing. I think it is good to have me time. But for what purpose. I recall being at a School Fair once and it was a wonderful event, yet I saw some disturbingly self centered actions by both children and parents alike. Pushing in, in lines for rides and other actions which showed no regard for others at all. Yes, Jesus did take time out to be alone, but it was to refresh himself so he could re-engage in ministry. Jesus came out of these solitary times and went into action. Today we’ve heard a classic example of this where Jesus immediately coming upon the crowd heals their sick, and after that provides them with food. So taking time out for ourselves, should normally be so that we can better live out our lives as followers of Jesus. It is not just for selfish indulgence.

The Genesis reading this morning also addresses this issue of taking time to be with God. We hear how Jacob spent the whole night wrestling with God and eventually received a blessing. When we spent time with God, do we wrestle? Do we take the time to really find out the ways God wants to direct our lives?

Jesus Feeds the 5000

And now to the miracle of the feeding of the 5000. The main theme of the Gospel reading this morning is of a Jesus who has compassion for people. When the disciples wanted to send the people away, Jesus said No – you feed them. Sometimes in our faith and in our lives things seem to be very complicated, but for Jesus things always seem to be simple. The people were hungry. They needed to be fed, so he fed them. Sometimes we forget how much God loves us. This miracle reminds us that God is not only concerned with our spiritual lives, but also with our physical bodies. God wants to look after us.

Now this miracle was obviously deeply embedded in the minds of Jesus followers, as it appears in each of the 4 gospels.

I'd like us now to look at some of the symbolism we might see in today's gospel. We know that Matthew's Gospel is intended for a Jewish audience. The miraculous provision of food is something the Jewish people were familiar with from the Old Testament. During the Exodus the Jews ate manna from Heaven. Here Jesus is shown in a similar light to the Great Moses who prayed to God for the manna to appear.

There are also very clear Eucharistic overtones in this story. We hear how Jesus took the Bread and looked up to Heaven. We hear how Jesus gave thanks, and we hear how Jesus broke the loaves. It sounds very much like what we do, to remember what Jesus did for us on the cross, so that we can be in a relationship with God, as we await his return. Finally, in the symbolism, Jesus often compares the Kingdom of Heaven to a Banquet. By providing such a miraculous amount of food Jesus is foreshadowing that in Him the Kingdom of Heaven is coming.

Justice Issue

And finally, there is the issue of Social Justice in this miracle story.

We hear Jesus teaching his disciples. The disciples just want to send the people away. Jesus is very clear in making the disciples do the work. We hear in verse 19 "Then he gave them to the disciples and the disciples gave them to the people."

We are now Jesus' disciples. The work of feeding the hungry still exists in the world today and as disciples it is also one of our tasks.

In the last century a specific theology called Liberation Theology was developed, in countries where peoples were oppressed. And it has even been said that "the Eucharist will never be complete so long as people still go hungry in our world."

Conclusion

So what might we take away from the miracle of the feeding of the 5000 this morning. Well firstly I hope we might take away the fact that Jesus spent time in solitude before he performed this miracle, and that it is important for us to spend time alone with God in our lives. Secondly we are reminded of the love and compassion Jesus has for us. He cares for our whole beings. He wants to look after us, not only spiritually but also physically. Regardless of how good or bad we are at following him. He will be there for us, and he also expects us to be there for others.