

Sermon July 30th 2006 – Doug Lackie

Questions and Answers

2 Kings 42-44

John 6:1-15

Ephesians 3:1-6

Jesus in the previous chapter of John has had a confrontational discourse with the leaders in the Temple in Jerusalem. There was no ambiguity on Jesus part, he made it quite clear in his discussion with the Scribes and Pharisees as to who he was, the incarnate Son of God. The situation became dangerous, for Jesus, now was not the time, the final conflict was to take place a year later. It was time to leave the scene to leave Jerusalem, he had made his point with the rulers of the Temple, and they rejected him in spite of his teaching and healings.

Surely, for all of us when we are faced with uncompromising conflict within our families at work or socially, its best to chill out for a while, this is what Jesus and the disciples wisely choose to do.

We next see Jesus 100 kilometers from Jerusalem at Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee in this vignette Jesus has been teaching, performing many miracles along the way. The crowd of followers are amassing, inspired by Jesus' teaching and curing the sick.

The Passover festivities are about to start, there are many travelers making their way to their families in other towns, some making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, some to abandon their travel plans, to follow Jesus.

Jesus and the Disciples have to break away from the crowd; it is time for prayer, a time for rest, a time to reflect, a time to strengthen the understanding and faith of the Disciples.

Don't all need a break from the pressures of life; we all look forward to long weekend breaks with our families, a time for us to recharge the batteries physically and spiritually. It was not easy for Jesus to escape the crowds, in fact next to impossible. The fastest and best way of escape was to sail across the Sea of Galilee or Lake Tiberius to Bethsaida which happened to be the home town of the Disciple Phillip, a rowing distance of 4 miles.

It was obvious for the crowd to spot the direction where Jesus was going, for them however it was a 9 mile hike around the lake if they wished to catch up. They would also have to go upstream on the Jordan River to a fording point close to where the river flowed into the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus is like a magnet his spirit draws people to him, it did then as it does now. People seek him out in their lives; for if we have him in our hearts we have a thirst for his presence which only he can satisfy.

Settled on a hill overlooking a grassy plain Jesus surveys the crowd gathering, they have tracked him down, they have followed and pursued him. Traveling a long way over poor roads and rugged countryside they are tired and hungry, they have a need to rest, and the need to be nourished both physically and spiritually.

In this Gospel of John, Jesus is the one who initiates the question to the Disciples specifically to Phillip "how can we feed these people they are tired and hungry" Phillip

who is from the area is without an answer he was in a state of despair. Wringing his hands Philip calculates it will take 6 months wages to buy bread to feed the 5000 men plus women and children.

Jesus the host of this gathering recognized a caring responsibility for crowd, he cared for them, they were his flock, and they had to be fed.

Andrew came to the rescue bringing a young lad to Jesus who offered up 5 barley loaves and 2 fish, pickled fish no bigger than sardines. It was a generous offering from the young lad for it was probably was for his journey that lay ahead. Suffer little children to come unto me, what a privilege for this young boy to be brought to Christ and to provide the means for a miracle in feeding the 5000 people.

We see Jesus the incarnate Word; the creator in human existence, in action, fully at oneness with God as he was in heaven, with the power to control the elements of his creation, whether it is a few barley loaves or the wind or the waves of the sea. For Jesus, the agent of all things made; there is not a single thing which exists in this world which came into being without him.

The people are seated on the grassy shore. Jesus says grace, in all probability the prayer offered in every Jewish home. "Blessed art thou O' Lord, our God who causes to come forth bread from the earth". The people eat and are filled, their hunger satisfied.

Can we imagine all of us being present, being part of the many thousands that day in Galilee? Being in the presence of the incarnate Christ listening, looking and watching with rapt attention. Listening to the words spoken by him, then to receive the coarse barley bread given thanks for and blessed by Christ the very Bread of life.

Let us imagine for a moment we are present sitting on the grassy plain by the Sea of Galilee part of the crowd, sitting on the grass overlooking the water, it is evening, the crowd is restless, they are tired and hungry. We see Jesus and the Disciples coming down the hill towards us, vicariously we are about to become partakers of a sacramental meal, receiving the bread of life from Christ himself.

In our hearts then let us all feel the presence of the Holy Spirit within us at this time.

When the meal was over Jesus asked that the barley fragments left over be picked up so that nothing would be lost, for this was precious bread, bread that brought salvation for those who believed in him; also symbolizing Jesus concern that no soul would be lost. Twelve baskets, one for each Disciple was filled. Each Disciple would have a basket called a KOPHINOS a bottle shaped basket; no Jew ever traveled without one for it would contain their provisions for travel.

It had been a momentous day, many miracles performed by Jesus, curing the sick, teaching that the Kingdom of God had arrived for all people. For those who believed in him that he was the Messiah, not the Messiah that would lead them to military and political victory over the Romans, which they were hoping for, but a victory that would lead to a whole new paradigm of religious cultural belief, leading to eternal salvation.

The story of the miracle apart from Jesus involves 3 other people, the young boy, the Disciples Philip and Andrew. Firstly the young boy is brought to Christ with his offering of barley loaves, peasant bread and two little fish. The Bible scholars state that in all likelihood the boy had 5 barley cakes as opposed to loaves and the two fish were pickled fish similar to sardines.

Those of us who have children have brought their children to Christ firstly through baptism and as they grew in childhood to expose them to religious training within the church, with the hope that they would confirm their belief in Christ in mature years.

The Apostle Andrew would spend his entire life bringing people to Christ, his actions that day were positive in contrast to Philip. When faced with a lack of food to feed the thousands assembled he took positive action, he did not wring his hands in despair.

When faced with a compelling situation in life especially in service for Christ and his Church we are not to ring our hands in despair but to prayerfully seek out positive action in providing ideas and leadership that the Holy Spirit will work among us to a satisfying conclusion. In contrast Philip when asked by Jesus where they could find food to feed the crowd, Philip gave a despairing answer. Certainly not a helpful answer and not the answer Jesus was looking for.

Jesus was testing Philip, as well as the other Disciples to acknowledge that the only way to feed the crowd facing them was for them to recognize and put their faith and trust in him, Jesus, to acknowledge that he Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah, only he could address the situation. Jesus knew what was necessary, feed my people,

Jesus was again about to act miraculously as he did previously by changing water into wine at the wedding at Cana. Philip had been at that wedding feast, he had seen Jesus perform miracles previously, Philip's response was not to acknowledge that Jesus was the Son Of God; or that he Jesus could accomplish through his oneness with God had the power, the power to feed the people.

The recognition that Jesus was the Messiah by the Disciples was to follow shortly when the disciples were asked "who do you say I am" Peter answers for the Disciples saying "The Messiah, the living Son of God".

Jesus' miracles were designed not to astound, but were signs pointing to his glory that God was working within him and that he was at one with God.

Does Jesus ask us questions? To those who are his followers, the Christian Church, even we here at Claude? Does he offer us challenges, is he asking us how we are going to feed the people in our community with spiritual food that is not perishable but lasts forever. I think he does. Over the past years there have been many controversial books published as to the nature of Jesus of Nazareth. It is therefore reasonable for Christians to face the question in their hearts and minds when Jesus asks "who do you say who I am". Hopefully in answering that question we draw on our faith, a gift from God and respond as Peter did "you are the Messiah". Could it be we have been giving Jesus answers over the past 40 to 50 years similar to Philip, pragmatic answers not answers based on faith and trust in the Triune God of Grace.

Has the Church been caught up in the superficiality of the culture that now exists in the western world?

Our answers, actions and responses to Christ have to be given prayerful thought to respond to the challenges he puts before us as individuals and the entire Christian community. For the answer he is looking for is recognition, faith and dedication where we joyfully offer ourselves at Christ's' alter unconditionally in worship and service.