

Sermon for 29th July 2018.

Today's gospel reading is filled with the miraculous in everyday life.

There is the feeding of the 5000, when Jesus provides nourishment for the crowds and then Jesus walking to the disciples on the lake.

The feeding of the 5000 is the only miracle before the resurrection that is included in all 4 gospels. Each Gospel account begins with Jesus retreating from where he was and subsequently being followed by the multitudes.

John's account specifically states that Jesus went to the Sea of Galilee, while Matthew and Mark write that Jesus withdrew on a boat, and Luke has Jesus withdrawing to Bethsaida. In all four accounts we witness the same self-giving, self-emptying love of Jesus as he provides for those in need.

In all four gospel stories Jesus has withdrawn because of his need for rest, yet when he sees all the people gathered before him he cares for them and provides life giving teaching and food. And there is always enough to go around and always plenty left over.

As Paul writes in the epistle this morning - self emptying love, in the Greek *koinonia*, surpasses knowledge, and accomplishes abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine.

Now today's gospel story is not the first in the bible in which we see what we provide is multiplied by the mystery of God. In the Old Testament when Elijah is given a meager quantity of flour and oil it is multiplied and becomes more than enough to save a widow and her son from starvation and Elisha, when provided with 20 loaves, these are multiplied to feed 100.

All these miracles talk to us about the abundance of God's provision in our lives. And as the gospel story of the feeding of the 5000 witness to there is always plenty for all and there are leftovers.

In the gospel narrative we see that when we work with what we have, we can move beyond its limitations. The story provides us with the difference between negative and positive response to what may be perceived to be an impossible situation.

In the gospel Jesus asks Phillip, "How are we going to feed all these people?"

And Phillip immediately goes into a negative logic. He responds with, "6 months wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little" .Andrew on the other hand presents Jesus with what is at hand - a boy who has 2 fish and 5 loaves.

Jesus then works with what he has before him.

The two fish and the bread - and his communion with God.

And the miraculous happens. The feeding of the 5000 is a story in which we can learn to awaken to what we have – to what is before us and work with it in God.

I have been privileged to see this profound rhythm of life in the context of terminal illness when family members rally around their ill relative and come together in communion with each other and God. One friend told me of his experience with his own family as they cared for him. “They’ve moved beyond themselves” he said “and they have changed”. “We’ve never laughed so much together”, “and now we all share God’s peace together. It’s a miracle” he said.

In terms of our personal transformation the Holy Spirit works with who we are before him, with what is there within, and invites us beyond our limitations. The miraculous can happen. There are two miracles in today’s gospel reading and their connectedness offers us wholesome teaching.

Jesus walking to the terrified disciples on the water in the depths of the sea, speaks to us in a reassuring way that nothing prevents his presence with us.

This miraculous event reminds us of our own journey as we cross over through the deep rough waters of what may be before us in our own life experience– a crossing that may take us from a life of self-centered love to a life of self-emptying love.

From a way that uses life - to a way that gives life in miraculous ways.

And as we make this crossing from death to life, we are able to hold in our hearts Jesus words: “It is I do not be afraid.”

The lord be with you