

Juniper Green Sermon 6

Matthew 14.13-21

13 When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. **14** When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

15 As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food."

16 Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."

17 "We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered.

18 "Bring them here to me," he said. **19** And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. **20** They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. **21** The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Background

If you were to ask God to give you one thing today, what would it be?

If there was one thing you could ask for, what do you think you would say?

Keep a hold of that thought as we go through the passage today.

Perhaps the answers in this room vary.

Maybe there are some of us who instantly say:

"I want to see my children/family/spouse become Christians."

For others, "I want to see more children in this building!"

Perhaps some of us are content, and don't really have a specific request just now.

Yet I suspect that for most of us, we do have that something we'd like to see an answer.

That job to open up,

That particular family situation to get better,

Or that illness to leave our bodies.

For strength day to day.

For the darkness to lift.

For some company.

What we are asking for in that moment is for the Kingdom of God to break through.

What we are **believing** for this morning -

and this is our hope through looking at this passage -

is that because God is present here today,

that He knows each and every one of us not only by name,

but knows the very number of hairs on our head,

who loves us despite all our mistakes and wrongdoings time and time again,
and yet by His grace, loves us with such depth and longing,
that He answers our heartfelt cries,
and releases His Kingdom power in and through us.

We're continuing to look through the Gospel of Matthew,
and in the passage we read this morning,
we see the Kingdom of God breaking through again.
This time through miraculous provision of food.
It's a Sunday school story which will most likely be familiar to some of us.
But the backstory is one of difficulty for Jesus.
In the verses prior to what we read,
He has heard about the death of John the Baptist.
The story is that Herod had a wild birthday party,
and the daughter of Herodias danced before him and it pleased his eyes.
He was consumed by lust, and made a promise, a vow, to give her anything she wanted.
That just happened to be the head of John the Baptist on a platter.
And so this is what is on Jesus' mind (the disciples too).
And He wants space. He's grieving about this. He goes remote.

But at this point though,
its become impossible for Jesus to get away from the crowds.
He has become something of a celebrity figure.
People follow Him wherever He goes,
so much so, that here when He decides to go via boat,
the people follow Him on foot until He came ashore.
They had seen Him perform all these miracles.
They had heard Him teach in the surrounding areas and in the synagogue.
Whether it was in a rural or an urban area, this man Jesus, seemed to draw big
numbers.

And so Jesus has no choice in this situation but to face the crowds.
But even though He needs the space,
He has compassion on the people.
He performs healing miracles.
This is our Saviour - compassionate, reaching out to those who need Him.
In the midst of the sorrow He is dealing with,
In the midst of His grief, of His humanity -
yes He is fully God, but He's also fully man,
He has compassion on the people.
And God's Kingdom breaks through.

In a very ordinary moment, God's Kingdom breaks through.
Through the grief and suffering of the death of a friend,
God's Kingdom breaks through.

The people were hungry to see something of God,
that they were willing to follow Jesus to this desolate place,
this solitary and remote place.

Jesus shows here that He is the true Son of God,
and He displays here a clear Messianic statement of who He is,
a clear Kingdom statement of what was to come.

Human Logic and God

So the people have seen Jesus,
they have been healed, they have seen something of God, another sign of God.
But now evening has come.

It was time for them to go and sort out their own food.

This was a remote place, and it would get dark soon.

The nearby towns would've been small and would not have been able to accommodate
all of these visitors.

And this isn't just 5,000,

this would've been between 10-15,000 people!

If you have a pen handy, feel free to add to the heading in your Bible:

"Jesus Feeds the 5,000 'Men' (plus women and children)!"

So what would the people do?

If this Saviour was so compassionate, able to heal - what else?

I wonder if the crowds asked Jesus to provide food.

We're not told that, but what Matthew does say is when the disciples but in:

*"This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can
go to the villages and buy themselves some food."*

This seems logical thought - at least in the disciples mind.

They remind Jesus that this is a remote place, and that it was late.

They advise/tell Him to send the crowds away into the villages to buy food for
themselves.

That seems fair enough.

They are in some way concerned that the people need to go before it is too late.

But they are probably also aware that there won't be enough for all the people.

And so their main concern is their own welfare.

Jesus replies saying that the people don't need to leave.

He tells the disciples to sort the food out for the people.

Their human logic comes back into play.

"We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered.

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Both John and Mark's Gospels add: They said to him, "*That would take more than half a year's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?*" (Mark 6:37) (John 6:7)

It's a pessimistic reply, or if we're still thinking in terms of our own human logic and not the mind of God, then it is a very natural response.

The disciples choose the way of convenience, of their own concern and welfare over the people's.

But perhaps we shouldn't be too harsh on them here - they are only human!

Some problems require God's direct intervention.

And so Jesus offers up a challenge to them.

What does it say in v18?

"Bring them here to me."

Firstly, Jesus breaks into their weakness and into their doubt.

Fortunately for the disciples, and for us, Jesus steps into our situations!

Next, in v19, Jesus directs the people to sit down on the grass.

The people were hungry - physically,

but they were also hungry to see what more this man who claimed to be the Son of God would do.

Jesus then takes the food given to Him, and blesses it.

He gives thanks to His Father for what was there, just as we sang earlier, "Give Thanks To God."

After Jesus had given thanks - he gave the food to the disciples to give to the people.

Jesus was not intimidated by the magnitude of the problem,

nor was He so overcome by grief of His friend that it clouded His judgment, nor did He want the peace and quiet so much that it caused Him not to have compassion.

Jesus displays here another sign of God's Kingdom breaking through.

In weakness, in doubt, with little food, brought, in the middle of nowhere.

These are 4 opposite qualities of what we would naturally think!

Surely we need to have enough faith, we need to be strong, and we need to be have the best resources and in the best location?

Surely that is how we see God's Kingdom breaking through?

Let me read to you a few stories of inspirational Christians:

George Muller

George Muller was a Christian evangelist who ran the Ashley Down orphanage in Bristol. He cared for 10,024 orphans throughout his life. He trusted God to look after these orphans, living 1 day at a time, never telling anyone the needs. On many occasions there would be no food on the table. Dozens sitting with plates and utensils. They would

thank God for the food that wasn't there. Before he finished praying, a knock at the door came with all the food they needed. This happened over and over again.

Heidi Baker

Heidi Baker is a missionary based in Mozambique.

She has seen numerous miracles involving food in her time there.

Let me read one story to you:

"more than 50 children packed in at the Baker's house, and food had begun to run low. Nelda, a friend from the U.S. embassy, came to visit the Bakers, bringing a pot of chili for the immediate family. "I have a big family," Heidi replied. Nelda protested that she had only brought enough for the Bakers, but Heidi gave thanks for the food and immediately began serving it to the encamped kids. The pot, brought to feed 4, was not empty until everyone had eaten!"

Jackie Pullinger

Jackie Pullinger is a British-born missionary who has been based in Hong Kong for over 50 years. Some of you may have heard of her now classic book, 'Chasing The Dragon.'

In 1966 Jackie left London on a boat with the equivalent of £10 in her pocket, not knowing where she was going, but knowing God had called her to be a missionary. She eventually landed in Hong Kong, but was denied entry as she didn't have enough money, she didn't have a job, and she didn't know anyone. However, at that very point she said to the Immigration Staff: *"oh wait! I have a relative who is a police officer!"* It was decided that that was enough for her - and she was allowed in. She was also told that her money would not last her 3 days.

It ended up lasting her 3 months.

God has worked in miraculous and remarkable ways through Jackie, and she is an amazing modern day example of someone who has followed the call of God to be the light, and to trust wholeheartedly in God, even when she didn't know what she was doing. She has since been awarded an OBE by the Queen.

Provision from Jesus - A Taste of the Kingdom

That's the real deal stuff.

It's amazing stuff. It's challenging stuff.

I wonder how many of us take the easy road out.

It can often be easy to think that God's Kingdom more often breaks through to those who *really* need it.

We can perhaps quite easily accept a miracle in Africa - they need it more than us.

Or heroic missionaries - they are the special ones.

What about little ol' us though?

This goes back to my question at the beginning:

If you were to ask God to give you one thing today, what would it be?

Let me rephrase it slightly.

If God could show His Kingdom through you today, would you believe it?

Do you believe God can use ordinary folk like me and you?

Why did I tell these 3 stories?

Because they are signs of God's Kingdom breaking through.

They are an encouragement to us because they are 3 ordinary folk, who were mightily used in God's Kingdom because they offered all of themselves to all of Him.

They didn't have much to offer in terms of possessions, or gifting.

They just had simple faith in an Almighty God.

What did the disciples bring to Jesus?

Did they bring much?

No, they took 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish from a young boy.

Did they have much faith?

Not really.

To be around Jesus and to see miracle after miracle and to not get it,

That is part and parcel of the disciples journey.

It happened time and time again!

And yet we can relate to all of this.

Sometimes we think that what we give to Jesus can be insufficient.

We can think our time, talents and treasure aren't worth it.

We can also think that because we missed our Bible reading a few times this week,

Or because our prayer life isn't as good as it ought to be,

then Jesus is not as interested in us as He once was.

Or there is just that sin that holds us back,

That one sin, that sin we seem to hide well in public,

But behind closed doors, it rears its ugly head time and time again.

We think that because of past mistakes God isn't going to give us a 2nd chance.

Or maybe you just feel fed up - God has forgotten me.

Do you know how much Jesus loves you?

Really - do you know how much He truly cares for you?

Come as you are to Him today!

Can I remind you this morning of one of the beatitudes:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

What does that mean?

Well, it means that those who are weak,

those who begin to recognise their need of God,

those who start to admit - "I can't do this on my own",

those who come to God as they are -

THAT is the sort of people God loves to work through!

THAT is the sort of people to whom God reveals His Kingdom!

We read earlier in Isaiah 55:

“Come, all you who are thirsty,
come to the waters;

God is calling some of us today to change.
It doesn't matter how long you've been a Christian.
God doesn't call the equipped,
He equips the called.

There is much room today for those of us who God is calling to new things.
How do we see God's Kingdom breakthrough?
By simply offering ourselves in our weakness.

Conclusion

And so to close, What does it say in vv20-21(NLT)?

“They all ate as much as they wanted, and afterward, the disciples picked up 12 baskets of leftovers. About 5,000 men were fed that day, in addition to all the women and children!”

The people were fed.
Those hungry became satisfied.
And there was much left over.
Not scraps at the table.
That's not what God's Kingdom is.
This is the fruit of God's Kingdom: seeing the Father's lavish abundance and miraculous power displayed through Jesus Christ.

So what is your response this morning?

We've thought about that one request we have to God.
We've looked at the Kingdom of God breaking through.
We've heard about the lives of ordinary, faithful Christians used by an extraordinary God.
We've spoken about coming as we are to Jesus.
We've recognised the abundant life that there is to be found in Him.

But what are you going to do with it?
Let's pray.

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Prayer:

Lord, we acknowledge that in You there is fullness of life.

Forgive us when we fall short.

Forgive us when we don't remember Your great love for us.

Lord, in Your mercy and by Your grace, pour out Your Spirit afresh amongst us,

that we would respond to Your call,

that we would see Your Kingdom come,

Your will be done,

in our lives here on earth,

as it is in heaven,

for the sake of Your Glory,

and the honour of Your Great Name.

Amen.