

Introduction

I want to start with a dangerous topic. Dangerous because it might distract you and put your mind on other matters than the text we have before us this morning.

I want to think about lunch!

Perhaps there are those of you who were already thinking about lunch. Maybe you have that tell tale rumble in the stomach or maybe you were hard at work before church this morning getting your meal ready.

Today we've got some friends coming round for lunch and it's always a reminder that making a meal isn't a straightforward task. Being hospitable is well worthwhile but can be hard work.

First you invite,
then you plan a menu,
then you shop,
you cook,
you host,
you serve
and then finally you clear up.

It can be a lot of work especially if like me your skills don't naturally lie in the kitchen. As the old joke goes I can try to treat my wife by making dinner but the fire alarm always ruins the surprise!

Thinking back to Jim's children's address last week when we were asked to decide if a task was easy, hard or impossible I wonder how you would rate making lunch. Let's say lunch for eight is that easy, hard or impossible? I'm sure there are people in the room that might answer that in each of those 3 ways.

How about making lunch for 4000 as we've been discussing already?

However even that is easier than the real issue, we're told there were 4000 men, besides woman and children so it might be more like ten thousand people for lunch. A pretty impossible task.

Review

Let's look back once more at how Matthew tells the story and through that I want us to see Jesus Compassion, Jesus Power and then consider how we respond.

Jesus has been travelling and teaching and as we pick up the story today he has gone along the sea of Galilee and headed up a mountainside to teach.

Matthew doesn't give a precise location but Mark locates these events for us in the region of Decapolis – the ten cities. Which was found to the South east of the sea of Galilee

Crowds of people had followed him and now that Jesus sat they gathered and he brought people to Jesus for him to heal them.

Jesus is meeting the needs of those he encounters and it teaches us of his Compassion and his Power. Jesus is the King of all kings, the promised messiah, the one who would come and save his people.

We heard in our second reading the prophecy from Isaiah 35:5-6

⁵Then will the eyes of the blind be opened
and the ears of the deaf unstopped.

⁶Then will the lame leap like a deer,
and the mute tongue shout for joy.

And we come back to Matthew's account v31 which is a fulfillment of this prophecy as Jesus heals the people that are brought to him in exactly the way that has been predicted. Jesus has the power to heal.

Interestingly this was a Gentile area, that is an area where most of the population were not Jewish and so in reaction to the healings there is slightly strange wording in v31 – "they praised the God of Israel" – perhaps they do not yet consider the Almighty God to be **their** God at this time. They think of Him as the God of Israel rather than 'our God' or 'Our Father'.

However the striking thing about this story is that Jesus shows them as much compassion as he does for his own people. We picked up in our quiz earlier that the feeding of the 5000 and this story is certainly very similar but it's also very different.

It seems to be at a different time of year, in a different place with a different number of people but most significantly it's different people. It's key that Jesus mission isn't just to the Jews, he didn't just heal or feed or love his own people.

And here in the feeding of the 4000 he once again shows amazing compassion. The people have been desperate to see and hear from Jesus for they have followed him to this remote place and been with him for **three** days. That's dedication!

They are all far from home and Jesus knows that the journey back might be too much now their food has run out and so he wants to send them on their way with full stomachs.

The disciples however have no idea what they could do. There's no 24 hour Asda, no McDonalds drive through, there's not even a local market place and they don't really share the same level of compassion as Jesus has.

This is a remote location with no sources of food. But Jesus says to his disciples

'How many loaves do you have?'

What can you contribute? he says to them

and so they give to Jesus what they have. Seven loaves and a few small fish and we see Jesus power demonstrated.

Jesus gives thanks to his Father for the food and breaks the bread giving it to his disciples who begin to share the food with the crowd.

And Jesus breaks more bread and shares
and more and more and more.

V37 'They all ate and were satisfied'

And not just satisfied but there were masses of leftovers too, gathered up and filling seven baskets. These were big tall baskets, like the one used to lower Paul down the wall to escape Damascus in the book of Acts. They finished with far more bread than they started with and ten thousand people were fed.

We've seen Jesus compassion; he welcomes people to himself and he meets their needs.

There are echoes of the people of Israel in exile in the wilderness. Like these people, a long way from home without any food and yet God met their needs with manna from heaven.

Power

An ability that only God would have

this shows Jesus power, he is God and can do all things.

The disciples on the other hand don't give such a good account of themselves. If you think back to the feeding of the 5000 then this whole scenario has played out before.

A crowd needs fed and Jesus asks the disciples to give them something to eat and they have no idea how they could. Jesus then performs the **same** miracle with the **same** result of overflowing baskets of leftovers.

Do the disciples not remember what happened last time?

Have they already lost their trust in Jesus power?

You think they might already have been looking around turning to Jesus saying – 'Go on Jesus, do that miracle with the bread again, we believe in you'

But no, instead they answer filled with doubt and scepticism. 'Where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?'

They haven't learned from the previous occasion and they still haven't learned to trust Jesus.

I've been told by medical friends that the medical school approach to training is 'See one, do one, teach one' as in see blood taken, take blood yourself, teach someone else how to do it.

However for the disciples they must recognise they've been here before. They passed the 'see one' stage when Jesus fed the 5000 and now it's the practical test but they're still not ready to trust.

Perhaps that is the same for us, we've seen something of Jesus. We've maybe been like the disciples and been around him for a little while but we haven't yet learned to actually trust him.

Maybe you feel in that remote place and it's hard going.

It's hard

To take that step where you know you can rely on him.

To fully believe in the power that he has.

To take that first step of faith or

To move on and trust Jesus even more.

Jesus didn't look for the right kind of people, people of a certain background, education or standing instead Jesus looked for faith and we can see that in the verses just before the Gospel reading when the Caananite

woman comes seeking help for her daughter. The disciples want to send her away but Jesus grants her request **due to her faith**.

I remember being at the swimming pool with my daughter, she couldn't swim, but she wanted to jump into the pool. Standing at the edge, ready to jump she counted down 5,4,3,2,1 and then didn't move.

"will you catch me" she asked "yes" I said

5,4,3,2,1 nothing –

"are you sure you'll catch me" – "yes I said"

And so it went on until eventually she got over her fear and jumped into the pool where I caught her. The next time she was a little less nervous until she was launching herself in before I was even close by.

Her confidence grew each time she was caught until she began to trust implicitly that I would be there to catch her even if I didn't seem close.

By drawing close to Jesus we learn more about him each time, we learn of his Compassion and his Power and we learn that we can trust him each time we take that leap and put ourselves into his hands.

Jesus wants us to trust him and to share in his work. It's worth thinking that Jesus could have done this miracle himself without the disciple's involvement.

When Jesus was tempted by the devil in the wilderness the devil said to him 'tell these stones to become bread'

even the devil believes this is possible.

So Jesus could have made the bread for everyone from stones but didn't.

Jesus asks the disciples to give what they have – seven loaves and a few fish – then he uses them to feed ten thousand and he gets the **disciples** to hand out the food.

It's the perfect illustration of the power of God at work. There is a massive need, beyond human comprehension about how it could be met and we bring our little human offering and God multiplies it and uses it for his glory and to show his compassion and power.

Jesus wants us to bring what we have. Our time, our talents, our gifts, our resources, our lives and when we trust them to him he can do great things.

Maybe like the disciples there is something else that you are struggling to trust Jesus with.

Your future

Your health

Your family

It's reassuring that even the disciples didn't always realize who Jesus was but I wonder why it is that we sometimes don't trust Jesus?

Why we're stuck, as it were, at the side of the pool waiting to go for it, waiting to jump, waiting to trust Jesus with each part of our lives.

Remember the compassion Jesus had for the people in this passage, he has the same compassion for you. He looks at you with care and concern, with love and compassion and wants to help.

I'm just a little early to be quoting Christmas carols but that verse from In the Bleak midwinter always sticks with me and I expect you will sing these words in the next month

What can I give him, poor as I am?

If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;

if I were a Wise Man, I would do my part;

yet what I can I give him: give my heart.

More than anything Jesus is looking for trusting hearts, disciples that are willing to bring what they have and to grow in their trust for Him.

Trust the king

not a controlling king instead a compassionate king

not a power hungry king but an amazingly powerful king

Dare to take that step and trust him afresh and see just what he can do.