

Hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew [14:13-21]

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

Now when Jesus heard this [the murder of John the Baptist] he withdrew ... in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, 'This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.' Jesus said to them, 'They need not go away; you give them something to eat.' They replied, 'We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.' And he said, 'Bring them here to me.' Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

This is the gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

The feeding of the five thousand was a key event in Jesus' life, so much so that all four gospel writers mention it<sup>1</sup>. Some even mention it twice. There is much more to this meal than meets the eye in that there are similarities with the last supper, the meal Jesus shared with his disciples just before his arrest and trial. On that occasion Jesus took the bread, blessed it, broke it and shared it. And that's exactly what he's doing here in the feeding of the five thousand he took the bread, blessed it, broke it and shared it. There must have been a feeling of *déjà vu* for the disciples when Jesus repeated those actions at the last supper. And of course these are the actions of the priest when he or she presides at Holy Communion. He or she takes the bread [wafer], blesses it, breaks it and shares it.

When Jesus blessed the bread, he was giving thanks for it, which is why Holy Communion is also sometimes called the Eucharist: *eucharist*, from the Greek meaning to *give thanks*. Our Eucharistic Prayers are prayers of thanksgiving. And our Communion services re-enact what happened at the last supper. Except, of course, that we don't share a meal. We have a wafer and a sip of wine. At least that's what we usually do at St Peter's.

However, at our *Bringing Life to Worship* weekend in September - some of you may have spotted the notices about it round the church - at that weekend we are planning to share a meal together at our Sunday morning service which will start at the later time of 11am.

The weekend will be somewhat similar to last year when we spent a weekend *Bringing Worship to Life*. Then the emphasis was on introducing new elements, such as new musical settings, into our Sunday morning worship to enliven it, bring it to life. This year at our *Bringing Life to Worship* weekend, we'll be emphasising that what we do in our daily lives is all part and parcel of our worship. We worship God with the whole of our lives not just in when we're in Church. What we do everyday, on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday, should be seen as a spiritual activity.

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<sup>1</sup> Matt. 14:13-21, Mk. 6:35-44, Lk. 12-17, Jn. 6:5-14

George MacLeod, the founder of the Iona Community, once said: “*Everyone is saying what is the matter with the Church...*” And he went on to say that “*Matter is the Matter*” with the church. In other words *matter* is the problem. The way in which we have separated matter, the physical, from the spiritual. We’ve made a division between the two when there shouldn’t be a division.

This is what the Bible teaches in the words from Colossians that David read to us earlier: “*whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God...*” [Col. 3:17]

George Herbert’s hymn expresses this idea beautifully: “*Teach me, my God and King, in all things thee to see; and what I do in anything to do it as for thee.*”

There should be no division between the secular and the sacred. And it is this that we’ll be emphasising at our *Bringing Life to Worship* weekend. Like last year there’ll be a range of activities for us all to join in on the Saturday. It’ll be a day of activities as spiritual as wine and beer tasting, woodworking, movement and music, clay modelling, cake-making, five-a-side football...you name it...we’ll be doing it. And at our Sunday morning service we’ll be drinking for lunch the wine or beer we’ve sampled on the Saturday [there’ll be non-alcoholic drinks available as well, of course] and eating the cakes we’ve baked for puds. It’s all part of bringing our daily lives to worship. We’ll even probably have some loaves and fishes.

Which brings me back to the feeding of the five thousand. We chose Eularia Clarke’s painting entitled *The Five Thousand*, from the Methodist Collection of Modern Christian Art, to use in our publicity for the weekend, because she shows Holy Communion as an informal church family picnic with people sitting on the grass while children play or sleep around them. At the top right hand corner, we just catch a glimpse of a priest’s hands resting on what looks like a pulpit or altar with a book, perhaps the Bible, open on it. In this way, Eularia Clarke skilfully seems to be bringing together both elements of the Holy Communion service—the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Sacrament.

Note the very young child reaching out and almost touching the pulpit in the same way that Nick or Jonathan often let the younger members of our congregation up onto the dais – sometimes they're invited! Note also the young mother tending her baby. Her hand is on the baby's head as if calming it but she could also be blessing it, giving thanks to God for her child. Another woman kneels, her arms outstretched in a similar way as if blessing, giving thanks, for the food. One woman has fallen asleep - how many of us sometimes feel like dozing off in church?! Others are tucking into the meal, which looks like it's pizza and chips, but note the young boy in the centre, kneeling and gazing at the pulpit as if in an attitude of worship. The scene is all very informal and fun but also worshipful as if Eularia Clarke is stressing that there's no division between the secular and the sacred, between the physical and the spiritual. At our *Bringing Life to Worship* weekend, that's what we want to stress.

I finish by quoting George Herbert again. He had a great way with words and he skilfully expressed in a radical and dynamic way the celebration of Holy Communion, much as Eularia Clarke does in her painting. His words may seem a little dated now but they're still meaningful:

Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back, guilty of dust and sin.  
But quick-eyed love, observing me grow slack from my first entrance in,  
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning, if I lacked anything.  
A guest, I answered, worthy to be here:  
Love said, you shall be he.  
I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear I cannot look on thee.

Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,  
Who made the eyes but I?  
Truth, Lord, but I have marred them:  
let my shame go where it doth deserve.  
And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?  
My dear, then I will serve.  
You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:  
So I did sit and eat.