

There is enough: God's abundance and sharing what we have.

Here we go again. Restrictions continue and many of you might be asking "how long" will it go this time? But with another week of lockdown, comes another opportunity to make seeded sourdough or bake banana bread! I'm not sure if you've got into the 'coronavirus-cooking' trend, but apparently we've been baking a lot of bread in this pandemic! Whether it is a frugal thing or boredom buster, bread baking is a thing we do in a crisis, perhaps because bread is a staple around the world.

Mahatma Gandhi said "There are people in the world so hungry, that God cannot appear to them except in the form of bread." In the beatitudes, Jesus says: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled".

Are you hungry? (I don't mean Sunday brunch)

Really, what do we hunger and thirst for? Is it righteousness and justice, in a world where life is often not fair? Where is God to be found when we are hungry? Life is not always fair and just. It is sometimes far from it.

In our Bible story, which we often call "The Feeding of the Five Thousand" (although we know children and women were not counted in this number), we hear of a large hungry crowd, and small offering of a child's lunch. Jesus feeds the crowd, and reminds us of God's provision and abundance for us, too.

This story is one of the two miracles that appears in all four gospels. The first one is the miracle of the Resurrection and we can see why that is important (!) so we assume that this story must also be super important.

In John's version, this miracle is one of the "signs" of the kingdom. Those who knew the Jewish scriptures would have tweaked that the story is reminiscent of a miracle that occurred hundreds of years earlier, when the prophet Elisha had only twenty barley loaves and some fresh ears of grain to feed a hundred people (2 Kings 4:42-44). When Elisha instructed his servant to distribute the bread, the servant protested, "This is not enough food for that many people!" But Elisha repeated his instructions, promising: "Just go ahead and do it. God says there will be plenty. There will even be leftovers." So the servant distributed the bread. The people ate, and there was food left over, just as God had promised.

The gospel reading today shows God's power at work in the same miraculous way.

Last week we heard that Jesus and his followers were trying to take a break from the busy work they were doing, and yet a crowd followed them and Jesus felt compassion for all those in need who were like sheep without a Shepherd. This week the story continues as we open to that scene on a grassy hill where Jesus has spent the whole day teaching and healing, surrounded by a huge gathering of people.

As evening approaches, the disciples were getting nervous, wondering if they should 'call it a night'. After all, they were tired before the day of teaching even started! Jesus looked at one of his disciples, Philip, and asked, "Where will we get bread to feed these hungry people?" Philip was shocked! Jesus must have known that the disciples did not have enough money to feed a crowd! Philip responds: "It would take more than six months' wages to feed this many people," Then another disciple, Andrew, said, "Here's a boy with two fish and five loaves of bread. But that is not enough for so many people." So then, like the prayer of Thanksgiving we have when we do communion, Jesus took the lunch of loaves and fish, thanked God for them, and distributed them to the people. And when the meal was over, they gathered up the scraps and there were twelve baskets of leftovers - more than enough to 'round! Awesome, hey!

You've most likely read this passage before, or at least heard it, as it comes around every year in the lectionary, but it's funny how familiar stories take on new meanings at different times. Today, we're faced with a massive crisis across the world - and people are learning what it means to live with the effects of Covid 19. Under lockdown restrictions this week in Victoria most things are closed, and we are stuck at home (we hope only the week). There are two big responses to the outbreak. The first is to look out for ourselves. We've seen people bulk buying and stockpiling at each threat of lockdown, as people try to ensure they have what they need. Then there are others who are giving from what they have to help others out.

When the little child shared his lunch, he demonstrated a profound truth—when we offer ourselves and what we have to God, God's power can work through us. On a symbolic level, this example invites us to also see the small offerings we bring to God as able to expand and grow in abundant ways. Do we believe that?

The child with two small fish and five round loaves of bread never wondered if his lunch could help Jesus or not. He simply offered it willingly. It wasn't the child's power but God's that created this amazing feast. However, If the child had held onto his lunch, he would have been the only one fed. Instead, his generosity and faith made it possible for all to be fed. Can you picture the little boy as gave over his lunch, and he watched it multiply and everyone was eating his fish and bread? Imagine him realizing "I'm now part of something big that God's doing!"

Once again, a child reminds us to have faith. A child reminds us to offer ourselves to God. A child reminds us to share. A child helps us grow into an understanding of how letting go of things can bring a multitude of blessings.

We were going to have our Church Market yesterday and I'm sure many of you were getting ready to "let go" of a few items in the hope of helping others out. You may also be living with feelings of frustration, disappointment about so many things being canceled, and even have concerns about the church's future and finances through this covid affected period - wondering will we be ok, will we have enough? We can be comforted by the words of Matthew 6:33 which says "Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you all that you need".

Like the young child, who gave what he had, we are called to be the body of Christ, sharing our gifts in ways that serve others. We are invited to be generous, for many are hungry and thirsty for what we can share. Beyond material giving, we can share our time, our love, our support and encouragement. We can be there for our neighbours in their time of need.

I wonder if the reason this boy was chosen to share his lunch is simply because he was there, close by. Who is close to you? In lockdown I've become a lot more friendly with my neighbours and mindful of who is close by. I've become aware of my need for community and my hunger for social connection. In my work with the young people and their families, I have also seen the significant impact of Covid 19 on young people's wellbeing, and heard how many have struggled with social isolation and online learning. So much so that some have given up on school altogether. More than ever, they crave and need community, and yet under restrictions it has been difficult to develop community connections.

What do you hunger and thirst for?

We may not be like half the world, physically hungry, but there are other things that are scarce, and need God's multiplying! I'm sure our government would like to multiply the amount of vaccines they can get their hands on, but I'm also aware, as I see the blame

games on the news, that there are so many other countries with dangerous numbers of Covid cases and such a greater need for vaccines than Australia. I have compassion for our leaders as they navigate the big decisions that have to be made, in front of crowds who are eager for their needs met, on their terms. I wonder if our politicians could relate to the disciples who were wondering how they were going to respond to the crowds when it seemed beyond their capacity to do so.

I'm not facing that pressure, but I have found it a tough year, navigating all the changes, trying to stay focused on the many meetings on zoom while my child is crying from the other room, and I couldn't tell you how many times I've felt anxious about how I'm going to deal with all the competing needs around me. I have often become overwhelmed and have craved the clear voice of Jesus saying: "Sit down. I'll handle it" as I imagine Jesus did in the symbolic story of Feeding of more than 5000.

Mother Theresa said "We cannot do great things. We can do small things with great love". I don't know about you, in those hard times, when I've had a text or a phone call come through with a word of love or support, it often comes just at the right time. And these little offerings feel very big when I'm hanging on by a thread! I thank God for what I have received. It's wonderful to have people around me who give these small gifts of love and care.

In the song "Hands" by Jewel, we are reminded that our hands can become symbols of God's hands. Jewel sings *"my hands are small. I know but they are not yours they are my own"* and then goes on to say, in the coda, *"in the end, only kindness matters"*. **To be kind, to use our gifts, to give of ourselves is perhaps the deeper invitation of today's reading.** In times when there is not enough to go around, to know that God is there in the midst, and invites us to look and see what can be done with what we have, rather than focusing on what we lack.

In our consumer Society, we are rarely happy or satisfied with what we've got. Consumerism is built on scarcity and messages telling us we don't have enough, we need more and more and more! But in the language of the kingdom of God, there are different standards.

In today's story, the crowd ate and were satisfied. They witnessed the small meal becoming enough for all. They saw the man Jesus becoming more than they could believe - a prophet, no, the son of God! The Messiah! How amazing! God was right there with them. Like the story on the road to Emmaus in Luke's Gospel, Jesus was revealed in the breaking of bread.

After the story of the feeding of the 5,000, in John's gospel, Jesus heads off to walk on water (another incredible story), and then He tells them, in John 6:35 "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger and whoever believes in me shall never thirst".

Jesus offers life to us and gives us what we need. In God, the smallest act of love has a multiplying effect so "enough" is more than enough. The kingdom of God is expanded, as we share until all are fed.

Let's pray:

God of all, feed us now your bread of life so that we might not hunger, but be full to overflowing with love. May Jesus' love be known and shared through the small acts of kindness we can offer in our day to day lives. Amen