

Circuit Service 6th August 2023 – Revd Steph Jenner

Isaiah 55: 1

Hear, everyone who thirsts; come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

Hymn StF 125

Praise and thanksgiving,
Father, we offer,
for all things living
you have made good;
harvest of sown fields,
fruits of the orchard,
hay from the mown fields,
blossom and wood.

Lord, bless the labour
we bring to serve you,
that with our neighbour
we may be fed.
Sowing or tilling,
we would work with you;
harvesting, milling,
for daily bread.

Father, providing
food for your children,
your wisdom guiding
teaches us share
one with another,
so that, rejoicing,
sister and brother
may know your care.

Then will your blessing
reach every people;
each one confessing
your gracious hand.
When you are reigning
no one will hunger:
your love sustaining
fruitful the land.

Albert Frederick Bayly

Prayers of Praise and Thanksgiving

Loving God, we praise you. Your love for us is constant and sure: strong, to endure for ever; great to absorb the idiocies and errors of our ways; patient, to care for us in the small details of everyday life.

Glorious Jesus, we praise you. Your life in us is constant and sure: powerful, to deal with sin; caring, to hold us in your prayer; healing, to draw us closer to God.

Joyous Spirit, we praise you. Your grace in us is constant and sure: steadfast, assuring us God will not change; challenging, calling us to a better hope; sustaining, the seal of an everlasting covenant.

Loving God, we give thanks and praise, as we follow Jesus on the Way of discipleship.

We thank you...

- for the challenge of the choices we must make each day
- for your presence at the perils and pitfalls of the way
- for the humility of our life in you
- for your comfort given in abundance
- for your Word working daily in our hearts
- for a life of disciplined service
- for generosity of word and action, idea and encouragement.

May we so live with you, that all may see your Spirit within us, your love embodied. Amen.

Reading: Matthew 14: 13 – 21

Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there 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.

Hymn StF 415

The Church of Christ, in every age
beset by change but Spirit-led,
must claim and test its heritage
and keep on rising from the dead.

Across the world, across the street,
the victims of injustice cry
for shelter and for bread to eat,
and never live until the die.

Then let the servant Church arise,
a caring Church that longs to be
a partner in Christ's sacrifice,
and clothed in Christ's humanity.

For he alone, whose blood was shed,
can cure the fever in our blood,
and teach us how to share our bread
and feed the starving multitude.

We have no mission but to serve
in full obedience to our Lord:
to care for all, without reserve,
and spread his liberating Word.

Fred Pratt Green

Prayer of Confession

Merciful God, in your love and power you save those who draw near to you, through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Redeemer. We are sorry for our faithlessness, our imperfect allegiance, our faltering service. Cleanse us and remake us, so that renewed in spirit, we may rededicate ourselves to living out your Gospel message. Amen.

Lord's Prayer (please us whichever version you prefer)

Sermon

This Sunday's Gospel reading is the feeding of the five thousand, or the loaves and the fishes. It is recorded in each of the four Gospels and there is also the comparable feeding of the four thousand in the Matthew and Mark's Gospels. We could spend a while looking into the account trying to work out what happened, if it was a miracle etc, but on preparing for this service recently I came to a jolting thought:

Jesus fed the five thousand men (plus women and children) because they were hungry. They were right in front of him, and they needed food, so he gave them food. It almost doesn't matter how, it is important that others helped though – maybe some of Jesus' teachings had already sunk into his followers.

If we look at Matthew's Gospel chronologically, before this feeding in chapter 14 we find three short passages in chapter 7 that those present on that day may have already heard and known.

These are -

Matthew 7: 7 – 11 “Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asked for bread, would give a stone? Or if the child asked for a fish, would give a snake? If you, then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

Matthew 7: 12 “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

Matthew 7: 13 – 14 “Enter through the narrow gate, for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

The whole chapter is about preconceptions and judgement. In the first passage above, Jesus reminds us that if someone we are close to, that we love and care for, that we are responsible for, asks for something, for help, for food, we would give it to them. We wouldn't give a stone or a snake to someone who asks for bread or fish (I don't think the example is a coincidence), we would give them bread and fish and probably more besides if we were able to. Jesus makes the point that we are God's children, and we only have to ask... and then practically demonstrates this only a few chapters later.

This thought is followed, and emphasised in the next verse, commonly known as the Golden Rule, and is found in all major world religions. 'Treat others as you would have them treat you and yours'. When people volunteer to help in disaster zones, after earthquakes etc., or help someone in trouble in the street, or in the water, they often say things like: 'if it were my family, I hope someone would help them' – and this practically demonstrates this verse: whether you and yours treat them and theirs as you would want you and yours treated by them and theirs. If they're in front of you asking for help do the best that you can.

The last passage above from Matthew chapter 7 reminds us that this isn't always easy, doesn't always come naturally, we have to deliberately choose this way, and go away from the majority carries along by false rhetoric and lazy thinking, to walk the narrow path. Not only in our actions, but also in our spoken and unspoken attitudes.

If they are hungry, feed them. Physically, mentally, spiritually. Because then we can bring God's kingdom, God's justice, God's kindness, God's mercy, to all God's children, whoever they are, wherever they are, however and whenever we encounter them. Always.

As John Wesley succinctly put it when he wrote:

“Do all the good you can,
By all the means you can,
In all the ways you can,
In all the places you can,
At all the times you can,
To all the people you can,
As long as ever you can.”



Hymn StF 699

God of justice, Saviour to all,
came to rescue the weak and the poor;
chose to serve and not be served.
Jesus, you have called us.
Freely we've received, now freely we will
give.

*We must go,
live to feed the hungry,
stand beside the broken,
we must go.
Stepping forward,
keep us from just singing,
move us into action,
we must go.*

Prayers of Intercession

For those of us in the world today who hunger, we pray...

For those who hunger physically because they cannot afford to eat, or can only afford to feed their children; for those whose crops have failed due to drought, flood, fire, and other climate change induced issues; or because of conflict and war – we pray...

For those who hunger mentally for someone to understand them, help them, by stopping them being lonely: by picking up the phone, calling round, just saying hello in the street, acknowledging their existence and worth, listening to their story – we pray...

For those who hunger spiritually, who feel empty: for certainty in God's presence, presence shown through humanity in attitude and action – we pray...

Amen.

Hymn StF 663

I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard my people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin
my hand will save.
I, who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them?
Whom shall I send?

*Here I am, Lord.
Is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go, Lord,
if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.*

Blessing

May the Creator God sustain you,
may the Son of God direct you,
may the Spirit of God inspire you,
in all you do and say.

To act justly every day,
loving mercy in every way,
walking humbly before you, God.
You have shown us what you require.
Freely we've received, now freely we give.

We must go...

Fill us up and send us out,
fill us up and send us out,
fill us up and send us out, Lord
(repeat)

We must go...

Tim Hughes

I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have borne my people's pain;
I have wept for love of them.
They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone,
give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak my word to them.
Whom shall I send?

I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them.
My hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide
till their hearts are satisfied.
I will give my life to them.
Whom shall I send?

Daniel L. Schutte

Peace be yours now and always,
hope be yours now and always,
love be yours now and always,
for God is yours now and always. Amen

