

## Sermon for SJB and SSC 25/7/2021 john 6 v1-21 Eph 3 v14-end

If we'd been in that crowd two thousand years ago, after we'd eaten our fill of all that bread and fish, we too would have said, "This really **is** the prophet that was to come into the world!" Why?

Because, knowing our scriptures, we'd have been longing for the fulfilment of the promise that God would raise up someone even greater than our great hero, the prophet Moses. We would have experienced failed uprisings against the hated Romans who lorded it over us. We would have been eagerly hoping for God's promised messiah to come and free us from our Roman conquerors as Moses had freed our ancestors from slavery in Egypt. Our hero Moses had also fed people miraculously, on manna in the wilderness on their way to the promised land. Surely this Jesus, whose miracles and teachings were so amazing must be the promised one.

Yes, Jesus's wonderful teachings and healings would have been the signs that drew us to join the crowds in following him, no matter where to. We 'd have been hungry and tired at the end of this particular day and this miraculous feeding, even better than Moses and the manna, would have convinced many of us that Jesus really was the one we were waiting and hoping for. We might even have been among those who wanted to grab him and proclaim him as our king and been very disappointed when he seemed to vanish.

Oh yes, in his words and actions the human Jesus is very clearly giving signs to his fellow countrymen that he **is the one** in whom God's promises are to be fulfilled.

Not at all, though, in the way that they desire. That's why he slips away when he realises they want to make him their earthly king. They still have a lot to learn about him and they're definitely not going to like all of it.

The first Jewish Christians would have been of that mindset, a mindset different from that of the first gentile Christians. I preached about that last week if you remember when we read some of the letter to the gentile Christian community in Ephesus. If you missed it, you can still find it on your email or on the website.

It's important to understand where that Jewish crowd were coming from and how they interpreted those dramatic signs, but two thousand years on we live in a very different world.

Many 21<sup>st</sup> century people find it very hard to believe in signs and miracles, and yet they're all around us if only we have eyes to see. While I was preparing this sermon I came across these words from miracles by Ronald Knox:

*The feeding of the five thousand, taxes our powers of belief to the utmost. And yet...what is the feeding of the five thousand compared with that patient process by which vast plains of wheat shoot up and bud and mature, under God's hand, to make the slices of bread which you forgot to say prayers of thanks over yesterday?*

What indeed!

The gospel, **the** good news, the best, is that Jesus, the human face of God, came to earth to demonstrate in his own body the unconditional self giving love and saving power of God. The signs that he gave then, the teaching, the miracles, his words and actions at the last supper, his death, resurrection, ascension and the outpouring of the holy spirit at Pentecost were God's clear signs to them.. It was their responsibility to interpret these signs and to begin the spreading of this good news, which they did spectacularly. The letter to the early Christian community in Ephesus is a powerful early witness to this. It never ceases to amaze me that a handful of people, once traumatised by the death of their beloved leader, the one they'd pinned all their hopes on, suddenly became so passionate, outward looking and daring. What a debt we owe them and all the generations of Jesus's followers after them. What a responsibility we bear to our own generation to share and interpret those signs afresh!

There 's a special sign for the church today in this story. John writes: "Jesus took the loaves and **when he had given thanks** he distributed them". **When he had given thanks**" is the clue. The Greek word John uses for giving thanks is eucharisto- -the root of our word eucharist. Jesus feeds the multitude literally and after the ascension he continues to feed his people down the ages, spiritually. As we regularly open our hands and our hearts to receive the bread of the eucharist, we're linked right back to that first miraculous physical feeding and to Jesus's last supper with his disciples before his death and resurrection.

We may feel inadequate. We may think that what we can do to spread the good news is so small it hardly counts. If that's the case, remember the sign of the loaves and fishes. It was a boy's picnic, but offered to Jesus it fed a hungry multitude. No offering is too small for God to use.

There's a little story about Jesus being greeted by some very worried Angels in heaven after his ascension. They said, "Have you really left that little lot to spread your message to the whole world? What are you going to do when they mess up? What's your plan B?" Jesus just smiled and said, "No plan B" We are now part of his plan A!

That crowd of ordinary folk who had open hearts understood that Jesus was sent from God by the signs that he did. They received him gladly although they didn't yet understand everything that had to happen to him. Their leaders on the other hand were not open to receive him. Why not? Their motives were mixed but it looks from what we read in the gospels as if it was mainly about their pride and their desire to be in control. We too need to be wary of those motives in ourselves.

These days many people don't read their Bibles, but they do read their Christians. If people know that we are part of the church, and that bit isn't too hard to share, they should see God's signs in the way we live our lives, especially in the way we treat others.

I read this little gem the other day:

*God's providence is not in baskets lowered from the sky, but through the hands and hearts of those who love him. The lad without food and without shoes made the proper answer to the cruel-minded woman who asked, "But if God loved you, wouldn't he send you food and shoes?"*

*The boy replied, "God told someone, but they forgot."*

What is God telling you and me to offer? That will be different for each one of us according to our circumstances but be sure of this: nothing we may do or say to share the love of God will ever be too little for him to use, and to multiply.

May these final words of our first reading be our prayer today and in the days to come:

"Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen."

Carole Lewis