

ST STEPHEN'S HOME SERVICE - 2nd AUGUST 2020

INTRODUCTION

God feeds all who come to him hungry and as disciples of Christ, you and I, the Church, have a responsibility to share in that work. We can choose to follow that example quite literally by supporting the work of our local foodbank, and we can also join in with the broader work at hand by seeking to satisfy the bigger hungers of our world. Whether that be hunger for justice, hunger for freedom, hunger for peace or hunger for compassion.

Everything that Jesus did during his ministry here on earth came from a place of compassion followed frequently by action or by a call to action. And our Gospel reading today is full of activity. Jesus feeds the disciples but it's the disciples in turn that feed the crowds.

We too are called to follow this example. But the anguish expressed by Paul in his letter to the Romans tells us something of our human nature. It can be all too easy to sometimes think we can manage quite nicely on our own, either by forgetting or by ignoring our need of Christ. Christ the compassionate, Christ the one who – if we would only listen - compels us to action in the service of our brothers and sisters.

So pause for a moment to ask yourself: "What I am I hungry for?" (And I don't mean Sunday lunch!) "Where can I see a hunger that compels my heart and hands to action?"

CALL TO WORSHIP

All you who are thirsty,

This is the place for water

All you who are hungry,

This is the place to be fed.

Here, without money,

Here, without price,

All may enjoy the bread of heaven.

God speaks,

And all who listen will have life.

TURNING TO GOD

We come to God as one from whom no secrets are hidden,
To ask his forgiveness and peace.

In a dark and disfigured world

We have not held out the light of life:

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

In a hungry and despairing world
We have failed to share our bread:
Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

In a cold and loveless world
We have kept the love of God to ourselves:
Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Silence

**The Lord enrich us with his grace,
and nourish us with his blessing;
the Lord defend us in trouble and keep us from all evil;
the Lord accept our prayers,
and absolve us from our offences,
For the sake of Jesus Christ, our Saviour.
Amen.**

PRAISING GOD

Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised:
There is no end to his greatness.

**One generation shall praise your works to another,
And shall declare your power.**

All creation praises you, Lord,
And your faithful servants bless you.

**They declare the glory of your kingdom
And tell of you mighty power.**

My mouth shall proclaim the praise of the Lord.
**Let every living thing bless his holy name
For ever and ever. Amen.**

LISTENING TO THE WORD

NEW TESTAMENT READING (Romans 9:1-5 *New Living Translation*)

With Christ as my witness, I speak with utter truthfulness. My conscience and the Holy Spirit confirm it. My heart is filled with bitter sorrow and unending grief for my people, my Jewish brothers and sisters. I would be willing to be forever cursed—cut off from Christ! - if that would save them. They are the people of Israel, chosen to be God's adopted children.

God revealed his glory to them. He made covenants with them and gave them his law. He gave them the privilege of worshiping him and receiving his wonderful promises. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are their ancestors, and Christ himself was an Israelite as far as his human nature is concerned. And he is God, the one who rules over everything and is worthy of eternal praise! Amen.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING (Matthew 14:13-21 NRSV)

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.

Thanks be to God.

REFLECTION (by Andy Todd)

The world is hungry.

The world is hungry for food. The charity *Mercy Corps* estimates that, in 2020, [821 million people](#) globally do not have enough of the food they need to live an active, healthy life. [One in every nine people](#) goes to bed hungry each night. Some 98 per cent of those people live in so-called developing countries. But even in the UK, *Fareshare* believes that around 8.4 million people (equivalent to the entire population of London) are struggling to afford to eat; and more than half of those regularly experience physical hunger.

The world is hungry for justice. This year we have seen thousands, perhaps millions of people worldwide taking a stand against racial injustice. *Open Doors* calculates that 260 million Christians live in regime where they are at risk of high, or very high, or extreme levels of persecution. The *Walk Free Foundation* estimated that in 2018 there were about 40.3 million people in forms of modern slavery around the world.

The world is hungry for a sense of meaning, community and belonging. Even, or perhaps especially, in the affluent Western world, study after study shows that people feel dislocated and unsatisfied with their lives. Many are asking themselves, in Isaiah's words, "Why do you spend your money for that which does not feed you, and your labour for what does not satisfy?" (Isaiah 55:2)

The world is hungry.

Stop for a moment, look inside yourself, and ask, "How does knowing this make me feel?"

My guess would be – a sense of heartache. A mixture of compassion; an impulse to try to do something; and a sense of helplessness in the face of such overwhelming problems.

Hold those feelings a moment, and come with me to join Jesus' disciples at the end of a long, tiring day, as they look at the thousands of people milling around, far from the nearest village, and begin to think, "They must be hungry: where are they going to get food? (PS: we are hungry, too!)"

So they put this to Jesus. Perhaps (they think) his mind is elsewhere, and he hasn't spotted how late it is getting.

His response? "You give them something to eat."

"What, us?? How can we possibly help? We've only brought these five small loaves and two fish – barely enough for our own dinner!"

"Bring them here to me."

Like you and me, Jesus' disciples felt compassion, an impulse to help, and a sense of helplessness. If they had stopped there, there might have been 5,000 very hungry people that evening. But then they gave what they had to Jesus, and somehow – miraculously – the hungry were fed.

Could this be a pattern for you and me today, faced with a mountain of hunger in our world?

We experience a sense of heartache at the pain we see around us and within us, near and far. As St Paul discovered when he agonised over the stubborn refusal of his contemporaries to see that Jesus was their promised Messiah, that heartache is not to be dismissed: it is an echo of God's own heartache for his world. We feel compassion and long for the hungry to be fed, for justice to be done, for all to find meaning and belonging. And Jesus' challenge comes to us: "You feed them. You be part of the answer."

Then the sense of helplessness: "I'm too old – or too young; I don't have the time, I don't have the energy; I don't have the

skills or the experience or the confidence. I've only got these five small loaves and two fish. It's not enough."

But Jesus isn't expecting us to feed the world or right its wrongs by ourselves. He is asking us to place what we have at his disposal, and allow him to do what only he can. Can we trust him enough to believe he can take our time, our money, our talents and energies, our loves and skills, even our shortcomings, and use them to bless the world in ways we may not begin to understand?

So, the money which you give prayerfully to charities or to Church; the support you give to friends and strangers in need; the time you give to making it possible for others to feel welcome and accepted; everything you do out of love and compassion, though it costs you: think of these things as loaves and fishes given to the Lord for him to bless, to break, and to use for the healing of a hungry world.

You may never see what God is able to do with what you offer Him; nor will what you can give Him solve all the world's hunger. Many people in Jesus' day still went hungry. Many still suffered injustice – as did he. The loaves and fish did not instantly satisfy all the world's hungers. But they did give a glimpse of the generosity of God, His abundance, and His longing to see His children provided for.

I think Jesus' challenge to you and me today is this: will we allow our hearts to feel something of the heartache of God for His hungry world? Will we allow that heartache to move us to pray? When we pray, will we be willing to be part of the answer, offering our loaves and fishes – our time, money, talents, passions and even our failings – to Christ for his use, even if it costs us? And will we confidently trust in our compassionate, generous God to use them in

His own time and way, to go towards satisfying the hunger of His children?

The world is hungry – for food, for justice, for a sense of meaning and belonging. "Give me your loaves and your fish," Jesus says, "and together we can begin to feed it."

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Let us declare our faith in God

**We believe in God the Father,
from whom every family
in heaven and on earth is named.**

**We believe in God the Son,
who lives in our hearts through faith,
and fills us with his love.**

**We believe in God the Holy Spirit,
who strengthens us
with power from on high.**

**We believe in one God;
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.**

**GOD'S OFFER OF PEACE AND JOY TO ALL WHO HUNGER
AND THIRST**

Seek ye the Lord all ye people,
Turn to Him while He is near,
Let the wicked forsake his own way,
And call on Him while He may hear.
Ho, everyone who is thirsty,
Come to the waters of life,
Come and drink of the milk and the wine,
Come without money and price.

*And there is peace like a river,
And glory divine,
If you'll come to the water,
If you'll taste of His wine,
There is love ever flowing,
And joy ever full,
And there's life everlasting
For us all.*

For you shall go out in joy,
And be led forth in peace.
The mountains and hills before you shall sing,
And the trees of the fields clap their hands.
Instead of the thorns shall come cypress,
And myrtle replace every brier,
And it shall be to remember the Lord,
An everlasting sign.

TALKING TO GOD IN PRAYER

Lord, you are the bread of heaven, giving life to the world.
You fill our emptiness with your goodness.
You come to our weakness with your strength.
Come, refresh, renew, restore us,
Jesus Christ our Lord,
Who with the Father and the Holy Spirit
lives in glory everlasting.

Amen.
Silence

Lord, you are the bread of life.
Feed us now and evermore.

We pray that your church may hunger and thirst after righteousness.

May your church seek to care for and feed the hungry in spirit.

May we seek out the lost, and those in desert places, and offer them the sustenance of the gospel.

Silence

Lord, you are the bread of life.

Feed us now and evermore.

We remember before you the starving peoples of our world, those who suffer from poverty, famine or war, all whose lives are diminished through malnutrition and neglect.

Let the harvests of our world be neither hoarded nor squandered.

We pray for all whose lives are fragmented, for all who are broken.

Lord, you open your hands and satisfy the needs of every creature.

Silence

Lord, you are the bread of life.

Feed us now and evermore.

We give thanks for those who have fed us and cared for us.

We remember all who have shown compassion and tenderness.

Lord, bless our loved ones, our homes and our communities.

Fill our deep longing for you with your presence and your peace.

We take a moment now to remember before God other people and situations on our hearts this morning.

Silence

Lord, you are the bread of life.

Feed us now and evermore.

We pray for all who feel drained and empty, all who have no energy or strength.

Lord, have compassion upon the weak, the weary, the harassed and the helpless.

We come to you for renewal, refreshment and hope.

Silence

Lord, you are the bread of life.

Feed us now and evermore.

We give thanks for those who no longer hunger or thirst for they have been refreshed in your kingdom.

We remember those who have recently departed:
Flo Davidson, Sheila King

And those whose anniversary of death falls at this time:
David Cooper, June Fisher, Megan Rowe, Jim Adams, George
Lawrence, Rowland Humphries, Peggy Belton, Hazel Chinn,
Owen Laws

May we look forward to the day when we share with them
in the glory which is everlasting.
Silence

Lord, you are the bread of life.
Feed us now and evermore.

Merciful Father
**Accept these prayers
For the sake of your Son,
Our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

We pray as Jesus taught us, saying:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,	Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
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**your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily
bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who
sin against us.
Lead us not into
temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the
power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**

**thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily
bread.
And forgive us our
trespasses,
as we forgive those who
trespass against us.
And lead us not into
temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.**

**WE OFFER OURSELVES TO GOD IN THE SERVICE OF
OTHERS**

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*

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 be satisfied.
I will give My life 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*

SENDING OUT

Our worship is ended, our service now begins:

For all that God can do within us,
for all that God can do without us,

Thanks be to God.

For all in whom Christ lived before us,
for all in whom Christ lives beside us,

Thanks be to God.

For all the Spirit wants to bring us,
for where the Spirit wants to send us,

Thanks be to God.

Christ has promised to be with us
In the world as in our worship.

Amen.

We go to serve him.

**And may the blessing of God Almighty,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be with us all evermore.**

Amen.

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