

John 6.1-21; 2 Kings 4:42-44; Ephesians 3.14-end
26th July 2015 (8th Sunday after Trinity)
St. Andrew's Totteridge 8:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m.

Enable us, our Father, to respond to the grace of your Word with humility of heart and in the spirit of love; that our lives may be conformed to the image of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Today is the 3rd anniversary of my installation as your Priest-in-Charge, and a reminder of that wonderful welcome you extended to Lindy and I, our family and friends. It wasn't quite the feeding of the five thousand, but it was wonderful to see this building & the parish hall being so hospitable to so many.

And so, as it was back then, our gospel reading for today is particularly fitting, because it is centred on the theme of **reception**, a loving, caring, compassionate, hospitality. It's also fitting because it features a chap called Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, whose interventions are always valuable and to the point. It is he who notices the boy who, in his generosity of heart, is willing to share his five barley loaves and two fish. There could have been no miracle without this boy's willingness to give.

The reading today speaks of God's similar desire to go the extra mile, even to the extent of performing miracles. Now there are many takes on Christ's miracles – was Jesus able to physically multiply the loaves and fishes to feed all those who had gathered? - or is this story better understood symbolically, where Jesus feeds everyone with a spiritual food, a nourishment for the soul rather than for the body?

You may recall that at my installation service, Bishop Alan preached about the kind of nourishment that feeds the '**zoe**' rather than the '**bios**', where these two NT Greek words refer to different aspects of 'life.' **Bios** is where we get the word 'biology' from; it refers to life or existence – it's about the breathing, eating, drinking, sleeping side to life. **Zoe** refers to the energy, the animation, or vibrancy of life. When Jesus says '**I came that you might have life, life in abundance**' (Jn 10:10), he's using that word **zoe**.

Given his utter involvement with his Father, I'm quite content to believe that Jesus was capable of performing miracles, but however you understand this, the important thing is not so much how, but why? What was the motivation behind the feeding of the five thousand, the drawing near to the disciples over the waves of the lake? I believe it was compassion.

We all know how much images of starving children can affect us – they're disturbing, they leave us feeling uncomfortable, and for some, become a strong motivation to take action, to become involved, to do something. But imagine for a moment that you're God, and you can see not only those of your children who are physically deprived or abused, but also all the people in the world who are starving inside, not from want of food, but from want of understanding about how much God loves and cares for them.

Confronted with raw hunger, wouldn't any parent want to take action? Wouldn't a loving God feel with the utmost empathy and compassion; would he not want to take action too, be **receptive**, become involved? Well, we thank God he did, he

‘so loved the world that he sent his only Son’ (Jn 3:16). Having brought us all into life, it makes perfect sense to me that the Creator begat himself to save us from suffering starvation of both body and soul.

A former Dean of King’s College, London, Sydney Evans, who served for 30 years, was a man who also knew pain, who spent time with others in their pain. He held an unshakeable faith in the invincibility of divine love because he believed that the worst that evil can do is provide love with fresh opportunities for loving. He felt this, not because he’d achieved this kind of loving, but because he’d failed to, and he knew he was still loved.

So if God is the ultimate actively loving parent for us all, then the sooner we come to deep recognition of this, the sooner we are in proper **reception** of this blessing, then the happier we shall be. We can refuse his food, turn away his nourishment, rebel against his devotion if we choose, but it will only lead us into a spiritual deprivation, a deeper hunger of the soul. It will lead us into misguided searching for ever-elusive resolutions. Christians believe that God took action – he did something to show us the way back to *zoe*, to the energetic animated life – he took shape in the world, the *bios* world of physical existence, in the form of Jesus of Nazareth, the lowly carpenter’s son.

Last Sunday, I preached about what happens when we reject people or new approaches, rejecting what may be attempts by God to help us. By contrast, every time we are **receptive**, even of mistakes, every time we try to accept positively what God

offers, we can begin to catch glimpses, glean a vision of, a point-of-entry to, the K.o.H. We can be re-born into the life of the Spirit, be **receptive** of the Lord’s person and his gifts; begin to truly ‘believe in him.’ Christ’s union with his Father is absolute; i.e. what the Father wills and does, the Son also wills and does. This wasn’t a foregone conclusion – Jesus had to resist temptation to achieve this.

As a result of this, and through the power of the H.S., it is the compassion, hospitality and receptivity of God himself that feeds the five thousand or that draws near the frightened disciples on the lake. The loaves and fishes fill tummies; the presence and fullness of the ever-loving Creator fills human hearts, souls and minds.

And so thank you, people of St. Andrew’s Church, Totteridge, for the way the God in you has helped fill my heart and soul. Thank you for your welcome, thank you for the times you have displayed patience and kindness in dealing with both my weaknesses and strengths. I’m sorry for what may be perceived as failures – I’ve learnt a lot from them – and my thanks to those who’ve been so encouraging about whatever I’ve managed to get right. I take heart from Paul’s acknowledgement that the Lord’s grace is sufficient, that his power is made perfect in my weaknesses, and that in that broken, ramshackle, inadequate place, the power of Christ may yet dwell (2 Cor. 12:9).

*Spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.*

2 Kings 4:42-44

Elisha Feeds One Hundred Men

42 A man came from Baal-shalishah, bringing food from the first fruits to the man of God: twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. Elisha said, 'Give it to the people and let them eat.'⁴³ But his servant said, 'How can I set this before a hundred people?' So he repeated, 'Give it to the people and let them eat, for thus says the Lord, "They shall eat and have some left."'⁴⁴ He set it before them, they ate, and had some left, according to the word of the Lord.

Ephesians 3:14-21 Prayer for the Readers

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name.¹⁶ I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit,¹⁷ and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.¹⁸ I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth,¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

20 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,²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

John 6:1-21 Feeding the Five Thousand

6 After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias.² A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick.³ Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples.⁴ Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near.⁵ When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming towards him, Jesus said to Philip, 'Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?'⁶ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do.⁷ Philip answered him, 'Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.'⁸ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him,⁹ 'There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?'¹⁰ Jesus said, 'Make the people sit down.' Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about

five thousand in all. ¹¹Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹²When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, 'Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.'

¹³So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets.

¹⁴When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, 'This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.'

¹⁵ When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

Jesus Walks on the Water

¹⁶ When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, ¹⁷got into a boat, and started across the lake to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. ¹⁸The lake became rough because a strong wind was blowing. ¹⁹When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the lake and coming near the boat, and they were terrified.

²⁰But he said to them, 'It is I; do not be afraid.'

²¹Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land

towards which they were going.

Psalm 145 (10-18)

¹⁰ All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord, and all your faithful shall bless you. ¹¹ They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and tell of your power, ¹² to make known to all people your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendour of your kingdom. ¹³ Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations.

The Lord is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds. ¹⁴ The Lord upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down. ¹⁵ The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. ¹⁶ You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing. ¹⁷ The Lord is just in all his ways, and kind in all his doings. ¹⁸ The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.