

Reading Matthew 14 Verses 13 to 21.

Theme Healing and Feeding.

Thomas a Kempis, who lived 1379 to 1471 was a Priest in the Netherlands and the best known member of a renewal movement known as 'The Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life'. He gathered together the teachings of the group in a book *'The Imitation of Christ'*. He said, "We imitate Christ's life and his ways if we are to be truly enlightened and set free from the darkness of our own hearts. Let it be the most important thing we do then, to reflect on the life of Jesus Christ."

In our concern to stress and build upon the death of Jesus, we often neglect the life of Jesus. Looking closely at his daily life gives us clues on how should be living, to learn how to truly live. He lived a life of service, the Servant King.

Jesus was in the towns of Galilee and was drawing great crowds to listen to him as he told them parables. Judy, last week, based her sermon, on the parables Jesus told which started with the words. **'The kingdom of heaven is like.....'** In Chapter 13 Matthew tells us, **'When Jesus had finished these parables, he moved from there. Coming to his home town, he began to teach the people in the synagogue, and they were amazed.'**

What amazes them is the wisdom and miraculous powers he portrays. But they started to gossip. "Isn't this Mary's son?" "Aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas?" "Aren't his sisters living here?" "How come he's got this wisdom and miraculous powers?" They took offence at him. He did not do many miracles because of their lack of faith.

Chapter 13 finishes with Jesus saying to them, **"Only in his home town and his own home is a prophet without honour,"** Did you notice **'he said in his own home'**. In Chapter 12 Matthew tells us Jesus was talking to a crowd when his mother and brothers came and wanted to talk to him. His love of God shone through, He did not go he pointed to his disciples and said, **"Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my family."** Do we, each one of us do the will of God? Are **WE** members of God's family?

Matthew Chapter 14 starts with the death of John the Baptist. He was beheaded by Herod. Verse 12, **'John's disciples came and took the body and buried it. They then went and told Jesus.'** John was the cousin of Jesus. He was a fearless witness to Jesus Christ. His sole object was to point people to the one true light, to the Lamb of God. He did not choose the limelight. He told the people, **"I baptise you with water for repentance, But he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire."**

When Jesus was baptised by John, as Jesus came up out of the water, Heaven opened, The Spirit of God in the form of a dove settled on him, and a voice from heaven said, **"This is my Son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased."**

I am certain that we have all heard this morning's Gospel reading before, perhaps on many occasions. It is recorded in all four gospels, and though in minor details they differ a little, they tell how **Jesus took five loaves and two fish and fed at least five thousand people.**

Verse 13 **'When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place.'** The words used by Matthew / private / solitary / suggest that Jesus went alone. Tired by all the teaching he had done, disappointed by his rejection in his home town and in his own family, grieving the death of John, he just wanted to be alone with God. But the crowds, hearing he had left by boat, followed him on foot, walking round the shore. When Jesus landed he saw the large crowds.

How easy it would have been for him to have carried on in the boat. But NO! He saw their need and landed. He saw in the crowd that some were sick. Here was their first need, he had compassion on them and healed the sick. He gave the crowd a chance to experience his love, his compassion, and the grace of God. There was no thought of what he might receive in return. He saw the needs of many and fulfilled those needs.

As evening approach his disciples came to him and said, **“This is a remote place and it’s getting late send them into the villages, then they can get something to eat.”** They recognised the need of the crowd but felt there was nothing they could do to fulfill that need. They forgot the power of God. How easy it is for us to forget the power of God.. Jesus has a solution which the disciples must have found difficult to understand. He said, **“ They do not need to go away. YOU give them something to eat.”**

We can only imagine the feelings of the disciples. They said, **We have here ONLY FIVE LOAVES and TWO FISHES.”** What they’re really saying, “Come on Jesus, feed this great crowd on these. **HOW?”** They indicated their inadequacy of resources. They saw an impossible task. They no longer saw five thousand people in need of meal. They saw five thousand problems. Jesus can now `act.

“Bring them here to me,” he said. He told the crowd to sit down on the grass. There was no showmanship. He didn’t say, “Watch me, I’m the Son of God.” There was no drum roll. **Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples and the disciples gave them to the people. They all were satisfied and the disciples picked up twelve baskets of broken pieces.”**

God the creator worked through the hands of Jesus who broke the bread and gave it to his disciples, there was a continual supply until all were fed and satisfied, and twelve baskets of pieces were collected. Jesus in the power of God satisfied their physical hunger.

Can we move forward to the night when he sat at supper with his disciples in the Upper Room. Matthew 26 starting at verse 27 Jesus took bread , gave thanks and broke it, gave it to his disciples saying, **“Take and eat, this is my body.”** He took the cup and gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, **Drink this all of you. This is my blood of the covenant poured for many for the forgiveness of sins.”** By this action he meets the spiritual needs of the world. His Body is the bread that never runs out. His disciples will pass on this Bread of Life, as they did bread in the feeding of the five thousand, to all who believe, and they continue to this to the present time.

There is in Jesus, a continuity to a long line of prophets. 1 Kings chapter 17 records the prophet Elijah going to the widow at Zarephath and asking for food. There had been no rain and she only had enough flour to make one last loaf. Elijah said, “Go home, first make me a loaf and then make one for yourself and your family. For this is what God says, “The jar of flour will not be used up, and the jug of oil will not run dry until the rain comes.” She went and did what Elijah told her to do and there was food every day.

In 2 Kings chapter 4 A man came to the prophet Elisha with twenty loaves baked from the first ripe corn. **“Give them to the people to eat,” said Elisha. “How can I put this before a hundred men?” he said. “Give them to the people to eat and there will be some left over, this is what the Lord says.” They ate and there was some left over according to the word of the Lord.**

Jesus was not just a continuity of the long line of prophets. He was the fulfilment of the promise of God to his chosen people. He is the Messiah, the promised one of God.

We as Christians, often forget that Jesus was flesh, he was fully man when he walked on the earth. He was born as we are, he lived in a family as most of us have done. He as tempted as we are, he suffered rejection even by his own family. Jesus lived among us in flesh empowered by the Holy Spirit. We can learn from him how to live.

We have to serve the people in need. Jesus was the Servant King. We have to care for those around us, those in our parish. Spend time alone with God, in prayer. Talking to him, listening to him,

In a time of crisis people often ask where is God? Does he care? The only suggestion I can give is to read one of the Gospels, God’s care is shown there. When God lived on this earth he walked as one of us, he was crucified, buried and then there was a glorious resurrection, when we who believe die we too have a glorious resurrection and join him.

The Bible has little to say about rights but a great deal to say about responsibilities. God gives us gifts which we receive by grace, we do not get them as rights. We have to be aware of the needs of others, and being aware of their needs we have to have compassion and fulfil their needs.

The community of Christ in this parish has tried to fulfil needs. We have looked after each other with pastoral care. We have looked outwards , looked after other people in need. Our church building has become a place where meals are sent out to the hungry, The people in the congregation have made donations to help buy fresh vegetables. Having looked at the feeding of the five thousand this makes me feel so proud. I don't really mean proud. Lord I want to thank you, for setting an example of service to others which we have followed.

We should never compare what we have done with what other people have done. We should look at we have done, could we have done better. If we are honest we have nothing to boast about, except the LOVE of God and the cross of Christ.

I don't remember anyone coming to Jesus to thank him for the meal. Our LOVE and generosity may not receive much thanks from the recipients, it may be rejected. We may think it a waste of time and effort. We must never become weary of doing good things.

We have to seek God's guidance. S.C. Lewis said, **The goal towards which God is beginning to guide you is absolute perfection, and no power on the whole universe, except for yourself, can prevent him from taking you to that goal.**

Amen