



St Marylebone
Parish Church

The Eucharist, 4th Sunday in Lent

Readings:

St Paul's Epistle to the Galatians 4. 21-31

The Holy Gospel according to St John 6.1-14

In today's Epistle St Paul is doing battle as the theological heavyweight that he is. They're trying to sort out in the years following the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus (in the life of the Early Church) who has to keep the old Jewish law and who doesn't. The Galatians get it particularly in the neck.

Today's Gospel is in a very different setting. Up at hillside, above the sea of Galilee, the crowds continue to come. He's crossed the water and still they come. There's no theological wrangling here. The theology is over. The teaching and preaching that has attracted the crowd seems to no longer be the focus. Instead, it's a matter of what will we eat? Down to basics.

We might know that feeling well at the moment, in these strange 'Coronid' days. The stuff that normally occupies us, that we *thought* took up most of our time and energy and the rest, suddenly melts away and instead, the basics we'd took for granted become all consuming - what will we eat, where and how will we live.

And so Jesus feeds them. God does care for our needs, we can turn to Him in trust. He isn't 'that great big Ocado delivery man in the sky', but in Jesus we find that He does care for all of us, and *all* of us. 'Give us this day our daily bread' we will say.

But I haven't been entirely honest.

In truth, it's not as simple as that. In S. John's Gospel it never is. St John is a pool in which children can paddle and elephants can wade. On the one hand, Jesus appears to have stopped teaching and got on with making the dinner. In reality, Jesus is revealing some of His most important ministry.

We have said before that St John has no account of the Institution of the Eucharist. That is because in St John's Gospel His account of the institution of the Eucharist is revealed within the wedding at Cana (water into wine, the first miracle) and...the feeding of the 5,000.

Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he broke them and distributed them via the disciples to the gathered people. The people who had come with spiritual hunger and discovered belly hunger too. In that simple action we see the Church. Simple, but we know that not a single word is wasted in St John's Gospel. Nothing is by accident. So Jesus takes the bread, offers thanks, breaks and shares - just as He did on the night before He died. Just as He does through the actions of the priest at every Holy Communion. The Apostles, the first Bishops, show us the life of the Church - taking from Jesus and giving to His people. Just as we will.

But the imagery doesn't stop there. At the end, there are baskets and baskets of fish and bread left over. This God will give Himself utterly, lavishly, super-abundantly: His gift of His life on the cross, and to us in life, and in Holy Communion is not 'enough', measured and checked and precise. It is overflowing, abundant. A double measure, pressed down, shaken together and spilling over. That is how Jesus reveals the love of God in this stunning Johannine narrative.

The teaching was not over. It wasn't all about the dinner. That is not to say that God was not revealing His passionate concerns for our temporal wellbeing. That is there - central and important. But also that Jesus is setting before us that along with our temporary needs (which are so very much in focus at the moment) is the bigger picture of life and love, faith and hope, our life now, and our true heavenly homeland towards which we are all on pilgrimage, and of which we do not need to be afraid.

It is not accident that a few verses after the passage we have heard today, Jesus says the words that are written in beautiful mosaic around the apse of our church. Having heard of the bread with which Jesus will feed the world (as represented by those thousands) which will never run out, abundantly bring life to us now, and the promise of eternal life: 'Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst...I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.'

We all need bread. We all need to care for each other's 'daily bread' and daily needs at times like these. That is the best way to celebrate Mothering Sunday too - to love and care generously. That's on the one hand. We also all need - just as urgently and essentially - the Bread that will feed us for eternity. Jesus helps us to see with this greater perspective as we continue our pilgrimage through Lent today.