

The Church's prayer for this Sunday - The eighth Sunday after Trinity

Lord God,
your Son left the riches of heaven
and became poor for our sake:
when we prosper save us from pride,
when we are needy save us from despair,
that we may trust in you alone;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Bible readings and reflection for Sunday 2nd August 2020, The eighth Sunday after Trinity

Psalm 145: 8-9, 15-end

- ⁸The Lord is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
- ⁹The Lord is good to all,
and his compassion is over all that he has made.
- ¹⁵The eyes of all look to you,
and you give them their food in due season.
- ¹⁶You open your hand,
satisfying the desire of every living thing.
- ¹⁷The Lord is just in all his ways,
and kind in all his doings.
- ¹⁸The Lord is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth.
- ¹⁹He fulfils the desire of all who fear him;
he also hears their cry, and saves them.
- ²⁰The Lord watches over all who love him,
but all the wicked he will destroy.
- ²¹My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord,
and all flesh will bless his holy name for ever and ever.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen

Today's reading from the Old Testament: Isaiah 55: 1-5

An Invitation to Abundant Life

55 Ho, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and you that have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.

²Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labour for that which does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.

³Incline your ear, and come to me;
listen, so that you may live.
I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David.

⁴See, I made him a witness to the peoples,
a leader and commander for the peoples.

⁵See, you shall call nations that you do not know,
and nations that do not know you shall run to you,
because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel,
for he has glorified you.

For the word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

Today's reading from the gospels: Matthew 14: 13-21

Feeding the Five Thousand

¹³Now 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. ¹⁴When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. ¹⁵When 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.' ¹⁶Jesus said to them, 'They need not go away; you give them something to eat.' ¹⁷They replied, 'We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.' ¹⁸And he said, 'Bring them here to me.' ¹⁹Then 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. ²⁰And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. ²¹And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

For the word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

A reflection for the eighth Sunday after Trinity from Revd Charles Fraser, lead minister in the Eversdens and interim minister for Harlton.

Mass catering is big business - but even a mega chain like McDonalds would blanch at the sight of 5,000 hungry people advancing on them at short notice for a meal in the middle of nowhere!

"They need not go away; you give them something to eat," said Jesus. We are talking serious catering here - a serious catering problem. How on earth could they be fed? Some think that the theme of this story is how Jesus created food from nothing, like a conjuror, but I think there are much more important things going. There are so many rich seams in this story.

I wonder whether you noticed that Jesus ordered the crowds to sit down? I went on a time management course when I was first Head of Divinity at The Leys and one of the things we were encouraged to do was to let a person know non-verbally when you haven't got time to deal with them - we were told to stand up, and that would send most people on their way pretty sharpish! It wasn't a course designed for clergy, and I'm troubled by the pastoral sensitivity of it, but nonetheless it's an interesting point. Standing up moves people on, and sitting doesn't. I know of several companies that have removed all the chairs from its office meeting rooms. Even in some schools all meetings are held standing up—a lot less waffle, better planning, and faster decision making. Does it make for happier workers though?

This is far from what Jesus is about here - it's not a business meeting, there is no agenda, no worry about efficiency, no hurry, no competition. Sit down and be with the Lord. Stop the rushing around—simply be! Isn't this something we can all resonate with having been forced to slow down in so many ways recently?

Be with him. Most of the time Jesus was somebody's guest. He had no home of his own, nowhere even to lay his head at times. But here he is host to others, and he will be again at the last supper. His compassion for the crowd goes beyond teaching, beyond healing, he wants to show how much he loves them. Table fellowship is probably the best way to get to know people better.

There comes a stage in a relationship when you say, "Let's eat together, come round for a meal." That's how we indicate that we want a relationship to develop; to get closer. It's all very well chatting to people, at work over the water cooler or socially, but if you really want to get to know them, you share a meal - that's why the family meal is for so many the focal point of festivals- all those office and club and organisation meals - they are about renewing and deepening the way we know each other. The TV meal hunched on our knees, or the plate of fish fingers or a cheap burger on a plastic stool leaning on a bench in a brightly lit

room where even the decoration shouts eat quickly, those meals say something quite different.

The questions this story provokes are important because they are similar to those that are often asked about the worship of the church: Why come to church? What happens in Holy Communion that makes any difference to us today?

The first thing we must realise when we come to the Eucharist is that it can have no relevance if we are not 'hungry'. If we truly feel satisfied (that is, self-satisfied) and content with life then the Eucharist can make no difference to us. For when Christ told us that he had not come to call the virtuous but sinners, he was recognising that to those who were self-sufficient he had nothing to say or give. The hunger of the crowd was the starting point for Jesus to begin his work. Many of us will be hungry as we return to celebrating the Eucharist this Sunday or, perhaps, very soon.

The second thing to realise when we come to church is that it has nothing to do with our making demands. Our own appearance at church for communion must mean that we are hungry; in crude terms we want more bread, more love, more happiness. But telling God that we will turn our backs on him unless our needs are supplied will get us nowhere. We do not come here to do business, but to enjoy a relationship with Jesus. To be with Him.

We meet together to sit down with the Lord. We sit down with someone to discover more about them: to be with them. And, as we learn more about Jesus, we begin to discover, too, more about ourselves. We begin to discover, for example, that happiness is not to be found in always receiving more from other people; it is to be found, rather, in self-giving. When we concentrate on giving rather than demanding, we discover, as St Paul writes, that God will fulfil all our needs in Christ, as lavishly as only God can.

We come to church to give and to share. We unite ourselves with Christ's self-sacrifice by bringing our sufferings and concerns to church and placing them, as the disciples placed the five loaves and two fish, into the hands of Jesus. And he transforms them into an offering which is satisfying for everyone who takes part.

Christ's invitation is to "sit down." The original invitation was to be seated on the grass by the Sea of Galilee; today it is to gather in one way or another, physically at church or at home using written resources or digitally. He is the host, if we are alive to what is happening: we are filled with what alone can satisfy our deepest longings—the love of God.

Let us sit down with Jesus at his invitation, our host, our Lord, our God. He caters for us.

Amen.