Isaiah 55: 1-5; Romans 9: 1-5; Matthew 14: 13-21

**May I speak in the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

I love the book of Isaiah. Come, it says. Come, **everyone.** Whether or not you can afford to. Eat and drink of what there is. Which is plenty. Buy wine and milk without money. But then we get to the crux of it: it’s not actually about buying stuff, and this passage isn’t about getting things free. It is about coming to ‘me’ – to the Lord. It is about the compassion of the Lord. Come to me so that your soul may live. Hold that thought.

The only miracle that appears in all four gospels is this feeding one. But why this story? What is so important about this one? What does it reveal about God and about who we are called to be in the world that each of the gospel writers decided it was worth recording? In fact it’s worse than that – because it is found twice in Matthew and twice in Mark. That’s six times altogether. And that in the context that just two of the gospels have stories of the birth of Jesus; one has Lazarus being raised from the dead; only one has the story of the Prodigal son.

In the context of the life of Jesus, it is good to know that neither grief at the recent killing of John the Baptist nor fear of Herod could repress Jesus’ compulsion to heal the sick and feed the hungry.

A friend of mine recalls a Monty Python sketch in which Jesus’ landlady is being interviewed and she tells how one of his friends once came running down the hill to the house and asked how quickly she could rustle up sandwiches for 5000.

There is of course, a non-miraculous explanation for the feeding of so many people: it has been suggested that people were so moved by Jesus praying over the paltry offering of loaves and fishes that they all added their own sandwiches to the baskets rather than take food out. But that is not what the text says.

There was a great ascetic called St Seraphim, who lived in the 18th/19th century in a hermitage for 25 years and became more and more strict in his own diet. He started off eating bread from the monastery and vegetables from his garden, and then only vegetables, and finally spent three years eating, we are told, only grass. And when people came to him he gave them food – an onion or a crust or whatever there was. And people said it was the best-tasting onion or crust that they had ever had. It is about turning scarcity into abundance.

So how does that play out here in Matthew’s gospel then: the disciples want to send the people away to go and get their own food. They are practical men who think in linear fashion. 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. Come on, Jesus – time for these people to fend for themselves.

But Jesus refuses to send them away, and in doing so, he is saying something about offering. About our offering. He says: paltry though these offerings are – the five loaves of bread and two fish – we all have to give in a way that allows Jesus to amplify that gift; to make it bigger. It is not really about the bread, but about letting the spotlight move from the bread to what Jesus is doing with it.

It chimes brilliantly with where we are today. Reduced giving due to COVID means that the Church of England is struggling with finances. It is also struggling to find sufficient priests to fill posts available. Do we have enough people to continue the work of ministry? No, we don’t. But we do have this theology of abundance, that says that we do what we can and in the end what we can do will be enough. But we all need to ask ourselves: are we really doing what we can?

Each of the gospel variants of this story tell it slightly differently, and the whole of Matthew’s gospel contains a narrative about the Church as a body. It tells us something about Matthew’s understanding of who the Church is, and of the communities of which he was part. Here, it is about a great number of people in a place of scarcity. But Jesus gives all that is needed – all that we need – even if we are experiencing our place as a place of scarcity. Not by magically creating something out of nothing – although he has form on that one too. He takes what there is and, **through the ministry of the disciples**, through those who are called into ministry, everyone has enough. And he signals this promise with one very pointed phrase: They need not go away. **You** give them something to eat. You do it.

Through the great range and variety of ministries that God calls us into - and despite it all being incredibly challenging to do it – everybody ends up having enough. God blesses what we have, what we offer and what we share. And it is in being faithful in sharing what we each have that we are all blessed with enough. When we finally settle into our MMUs, that is something we need to hold in mind. We minister by looking outward, away from ourselves – not holding onto what we have but opening our grasp, to share with others.

**I leave you with this one thought, which has many applications: What we have is always enough. If we share it. Amen**