

## Intro

Where did your life as a Christian start? How did Christ introduce himself to you? You may have to look back a long time ago, but for some of us it is more recent. If you were brought up in a Christian family, you still would have to have had a time where God became personal to you. For me it was as a little boy, who felt lonely and down after a difficult day at school and had to make his own way to bed because his parents were working in the shop. This boy then prayed to God in his loneliness, and God provided as a minute later the boy's dad came to wish him goodnight and pray with him. He had never done so before as far as the boy could remember. Then the boy knew that God was real.

The boy still needed many different ways of encounter with God for him to declare his faith and to dedicate his life to God, and that is still ongoing. But that first memory is the pivot.

But you may have come to Christ later in life. And instead of Jesus revealing himself gradually, you may have just realised he was there, as he was offering himself to you, inviting you.

So what about you? Take a while to think back at your own time of meeting with Jesus first and give him thanks.

<Silence>

## The Promise

In Isaiah we read God's promise and invitation. God always invites! Is that part of your memory as well? That whatever encounter with God you had there was an invitation? God invites us to be part of him.

The invitations to the Israelites is very basic: Come, drink and eat, those who do not have money, Come! For God and Israel, abundance is not about wealth in the form of money and assets, but in food and drink shared in community.

And God promises that to the Israelites. Isaiah's prophecies are here directed to the Israelites who are in exile in Babylon. The beginning of the book is about Isaiah warning them to change so God does not need to send them in exile. And in the end Isaiah focuses on the people who have returned out of exile back home. But here we are at the end of the exile and God's word through Isaiah is one of hope, encouragement and invitation.

And the invitation is simple: "Come". God says: 'I know you do not have money for food and drink, but come, and I will provide'. It will not only be enough, it will be abundant. Not only does he promise food and drink, God promise life: "Give ear and come to me, listen, that you may live". Again that invitation: 'come and listen and you will live'. God wants us to be in relationship with him, a relationship where he leads us through life.

And at the end of the passage it is clear that the invitation God issues is not only to individuals but to the whole country. The invitation is for drink, food, life and to be God's

witness, through David the King, and for us reading this now, the Son of David: Jesus Christ our King.

The invitation and promise ends with that Israel is endowed with splendour, as the nations are coming to them and recognise who they are: The people that God has set apart for himself.

### **The Mission**

In our New Testament reading we find Jesus, finding some space and quiet for himself. He has just heard that John the Baptist has been killed by Herod, and it looks like he needs to process that, pray and maybe even grief over John's death. He needs sometime for himself, so he got on a boat and wanted to disappear so he could be alone.

But the people who he had issued the invitation to: "repent for the Kingdom of God is near", want more of him. They thirst for him, they follow him, going around the lake trying to predict where Jesus' boat may land, and when Jesus does, there they are: waiting expectantly.

Is this how we follow Jesus' invitation? Are we willing to walk around Lake Windermere in order to catch up with Jesus? Are we thirsting for him now that we heard his invitation? The echoes with Isaiah are there: "Give ear and come to me, listen, that you may live", and that is what the crowds does. They take a risk, they do not know what he will do or tell them, or if he will heal them, but they spend the day following him. A day of missed income, and for some a day of not eating... but they don't mind: Jesus is foremost on their minds, blotting out every other need.

And when Jesus saw then he had compassion on them. This word in Greek expresses the compassion from someone's gut: gut-wrenching compassion. It is a compassion that Jesus cannot ignore, it is a compassion that changes Jesus directions and actions. He saw the people, he saw their need, and had compassion for them and healed them.

Then suddenly the disciples are brought into the story: they also have compassion with the people as they realise that they need food. So their suggestion is to send them to the towns so that they can get food and lodging.

But Jesus does not want to let them go: They can stay. But then he turns the insight of the disciples on its head and he gives them a commission: "You give them something to eat."

Can you picture the faces of the disciples? Can you sense their reluctance as well as their helplessness? "We only have five loaves of bread and two fish" (You can hear them think: and that is our dinner!)

But then Jesus demonstrates that he is God. Bring them to me, he says. And then after praying he gave thanks and broke the loaves and instructed the disciples to issue them out. The miracle is of course that this is enough for the 5,000 men there, so perhaps 12,000 people? And 12 baskets are left over, symbolic for the 12 tribes of Israel: Jesus could have fed the whole nation, again fulfilling the promise in Isaiah 55, and like God in the desert in Exodus, providing for his people.

Jesus is God and he is inviting his people to be part of his community. That is the mission: Come and I will give you food and drink. Come and I will give you life, if you listen to me. Come and I will make you witnesses of me.

### **Discipleship.**

Jesus did not do this alone. He commissioned his disciples: "They do not need to go away: you give them something to eat". And they thought they had not enough for all, but Jesus made it enough. And the disciples had to distribute the food to the people and clear up after them.

So can we get the hallmarks of what it means to be Jesus disciple from this story?

1. To be with Jesus, listen to him and be available to him, even when there is nothing to do but to just walk behind him and stay with him:
2. To provide what we have. We may think it is not enough: our money, our assets, our skills, our talents, our love, our compassion, our motivation... Jesus says: 'Bring them here to me'.
3. And then once Jesus has multiplied what we had, we help distribute it: freely, there is enough for everyone, and then there are still leftovers!
4. And then clear up afterwards... Yes, things need to be tidied in the buildings, at home, or in people hearts, those who Jesus has given to us to look after.

And then we start again! And in the process more disciples are made and then there are more of us to help us!

But is this what we do?

1. Are we available to Jesus, ready to act when he is ready to act? Until the people needed feeding, the disciples were not mentioned. The story is narrated that Jesus is doing this all on his own. But they were there. In the background: watching, listening and then when there was an issue, bringing it to Jesus. Actively waiting.
2. Are we ready to give our only food to Jesus? It was their dinner! This is what they are supposed to eat. Are we willing to give of our possessions, including our talents, skills, attitudes and motivations? Are we willing to give it all to Jesus? "Bring it to me.", he says. Are we willing to share our time with Jesus and give it to those who do not yet understand, who are not disciples, who do not act in the way that Jesus wants them to act? Who would probably spoil what we have accumulated?
3. And once multiplied so that there is enough, are we willing to share it out? Do we realise that it is in this way that Jesus is reaching people: the basics of food, drink and security? That they do not need to go away from Jesus to get all these too?

What remains in the story as Matthew has written it, does not include any of Jesus' teaching. They spend the whole day with them, but we do not hear what he tells them. What does remain is the miracle of Jesus feeding them. It was in that that Jesus give his message: Come: I am God, and I will care for you if you listen to me.

4. And them clearing up the mess afterwards. The disciple did not leave the field like some discarded pop-festival full of rubbish and tents. Or in this case rotting food and fish. No, they cleared it up. Were they helped? They may have been. It does not say. Being a disciple is also doing the humble work of clearing up after the people have encountered Jesus. This may include not only practical but also pastoral care. We do not know what happened to the twelve baskets. As Jesus gets the disciples in the boat again immediately afterwards. So maybe the people were then disciplined enough to see to the fair distribution of it.

However, as disciples we need to do the work afterwards as well. We cannot leave a person who just encountered Jesus, we need to take them into our community, whatever the cost is to the community. Because this is not our community, it is Jesus' community and congregation.

### **The invitation to mission**

So Jesus invites us to his mission as disciples. And what do we do as disciples? Are we available, waiting patiently for Jesus to act, providing what we have to Jesus so that he can multiply it, and are we actively involved with distribution of the gifts that Jesus has multiplied, and then clearing up afterwards: physically and pastorally. Are you willing to accept this invitation of Jesus?

**Amen.**