

## Feeding the Multitudes & Stilling the Storms

John 6: 1-24

Thus far John has gathered together the truth about Jesus to show us: Who He is, the New Wine He is beginning to pour, into the new born-again wineskins of our lives. He gives us two examples of people who responded to Him: one very religious, one very sinful, yet both in need of a saviour. The Gospel of Grace embodied in Jesus is shared with a non-Jew and a whole village converted, and then a member of the royal household took Jesus at his word and later realises that his son was healed at that moment. John 5, as we saw last week, is all about whether you and I are prepared to venture out of our comfort zones and break free of 38 years of captivity whether physical or spiritual. In the words of the Churchill dog our response was: oh yes! Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit and out of His full humanity made that choice too, says John, and the second half of Chapter 5 is Jesus testifying that He can do nothing by Himself; He can only do what He sees the Father doing. Rather a good basis on which to live our life of following Him, don't you think!

So to John 6 where John building on the healings of the Officials son and the Man at the pool wants us to be left in no doubt that Jesus is the Divine Son of God, the Heaven Opener. Not only healings but also miraculous provision (like OT Manna in the desert) and Lordship over the natural elements, all-adding up to the first I am (Bread of Life).

So we pick up on Jesus' progress and find Him in great demand and the healing miracles flowing in Galilee. At some point He heads off with his band of followers across the lake to the far less populated side, but the crowds somehow follow. So Jesus playful as ever asks Philip: Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat? It was a test as Jesus already had heard from Father about what He wanted done. Philip was nonplussed: Eight months wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a

bite. Traditional Church at this point would take up an offering: Body of Christ would trust the Fathers provision.

At this point Andrew (Simon Peters brother) pipes up: of all the disciples he is the best at relationships and hence relational evangelism. Here he brings the boy to Jesus, previously he had brought Peter, in the future (12:21) he will introduce the Greeks 'who want to see Jesus'. What a great name for a congregation: St Andrews, but do we live up to his name. Are we busying ourselves relationally and introducing people to Jesus? I hope so. What Andrew didn't know was that Jesus would take a boys packed lunch and multiply it to feed the multitudes. Now if women were not in great standing, children certainly were even further down the order of things: definitely only occasionally to be seen and not heard. Mark 10:13-16 sees the disciples blocking the way of children to Jesus so this was one below the religious radar and probably because of Andrews tenacious heart to connect people with his saviour.

Five thousand mouths to feed and that was just the men: wow. John wants us to understand that not only can Jesus take hold of any life and make it count for the Fathers Kingdom but also that whatever they bring of themselves and their resources can be multiplied and used in the Masters Services: there is no doubt in my mind that John wants us to see the echo's of our Communion in this story: Offered, Received, Blessed, Broken and Given.

1. **Offered**: This young lad (insignificant among 5000 men) gave his packed lunch to Jesus: five loaves and two fish willingly given. The simplicity is stunning: he held nothing back. Augustine said: "Without God we cannot, without us God will not". This young boy was faithful and gave all he had. How about us? Is our giving more about what's expected and safety than laying it all at his feet? We offer in response to the one who offered all for us!
2. **Received**: Jesus took the loaves and the fishes from the boy. Wow! Just to have Jesus take what is mine is such a

privilege regardless of what He chooses to do with it. John wants us to know: whatever we bring He will receive. There is no question of 'not enough' from Jesus even with Andrew and Philip's worldly assessments. Simple faith: Make the people sit down on the grass, said Jesus.

3. **Blessed**: So Jesus takes and blesses the loaves and fishes. Seemingly small things in the hands of Jesus will much further than we could ever ask or imagine. Here Jesus blesses the gifts of a child, later He would pick up a child in His arms and bless them. I suspect John must be reflecting: it was no co-incidence that Jesus had said of the children held, "except as we become like children we cannot enter the Kingdom of God." How foolish we are not to trust Him with our very lives.
4. **Used**: So Jesus had the disciples distribute the loaves and fishes to all giving everyone as much as they wanted. The boy didn't go without himself and had the glorious satisfaction of seeing the miracle of provision and the multitude fed. Of course Jesus never did anything in half measure and there was always a teaching point for his disciples: Let nothing be wasted said Jesus. They did and there were twelve baskets leftover. Israel even if you lay down your lives for the world through me, you will always be filled to overflowing as well. For those with ears to hear, Jesus was already taking the Fathers invitation to the Multitudes and finding a ready miraculous harvest and response.

So clear was the sign Jesus was painting: a banquet for the nations that the crowd wanted it prematurely, so Jesus departed. Canterbury, hear the word of the Lord: Body of Christ give up your packed lunch for this city I love and I will create a banquet for the nations.

What are two things which might lead to fear in us and which the enemy of our soul rubs his hands at? Going without food, being in

a place where we are being overwhelmed by natural events. So we have seen the answer to the first is to trust Jesus and surprise surprise it's the answer to the second too!!

So its now evening, the end of quite a day for the disciples and time to go home: but where's Jesus. Still with the Father? So they set off in the boat, its dark, and its windy and stormy. A tough row and after three miles they are terrified to see Jesus walking on the water to them (trying to catch up?). I think I would have been terrified too. This was as much out of the box as the events of the day: the feeding of the multitudes from a tiny packed lunch.

Jesus speaks over the noise of the wind and storm: It is I; don't be afraid. Matthew reports at this point that bold and impetuous Peter responds to the invitation of Jesus to walk to Him on the water. Out of the boat he gets, and whilst he keeps his eyes on Jesus he is able to walk, but as soon as he looks at the waves (the circumstances) he sinks. Jesus holds out a hand, and safely he gets back to the boat. John doesn't mention this because he doesn't want the focus taken off Jesus. For John it's all about showing beyond any doubt that Jesus is Lord & God (as Thomas would later testify): the miracle of provision, and then the miracle of authority over the natural elements. Jesus gets into the boat when they knew it was Him (revelation) and 'immediately' they get where they are heading: the shore. For the early Christians the boat was a potent symbol of the Church (the oikumene: household of God) and pictures of a boat with a mast in the shape of the cross have adorned the ecumenical movement ever since. Oh & power over waves might well remind you of the God of Exodus who parted the Red Sea and closed it again baptising the Egyptians. When Jesus says: It is I it is the same Aramaic/Greek as later translated: I am. Aren't we learning in Oasis Church how God at the Kairos moment reveals himself in new ways! Fresh Vision of who He is was necessary for the disciples and for us too.

Do you know that I am absolutely convinced that I must be in heaven when as I awake the smell of freshly baked bread wafts up the stairs and stirs my senses! Fresh Bread! Yum! But how much more am I stirred when He who is Bread satisfies my hunger and animates my life!! Jesus here says: I am Bread of Life, not I will point you to the best loaf, or I will feed you sumptuously, but me, I, Jesus, will be Bread of Life for you, so that hunger (spiritually) will never again occur, and Life (in all its fullness) will be your portion.

I am convinced that with the turn of the spiritual tide in our nation that the Lord has graciously given us Fresh Bread and that the measure to which we hunger and subsequently devour that Bread will be the measure to which we see the Body of Christ in the UK revive and once again impact our contemporary society but first lets look at the tantalising spiritual journey the people of God throughout the Bible took to get from hunger to banquet and feast at the wedding of the Lamb!!

1. **Hunger!!** This is something physically we know nothing about. We might say: I'm hungry but it's a cheap comment. Developing World images paraded before us regularly show us that we can never truly say we are hungry. However, there is another kind of famine (that Amos mentions in Chapter 8) and it's for God, and His Word, and a relationship that will truly satisfy. God's people escaping Egypt made bread without yeast (Exodus 12:8), reflecting their priority of leaving Egypt as quickly as they could: We would do well to identify our 'Egypt's' and truly hunger for the freedom from slavery only Jesus can bring to us. Deuteronomy 8:3 comments: 'He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord'. We could all do with a portion of humbling, for hunger never proceeds from pride. God's people made sure they didn't forget this hunger by celebrating the Feast of Unleavened Bread (one of three annual feasts at that time: Ingathering/Harvest Exodus 23:15)). We

need to remember with thankfulness what we are saved from, as well as celebrate what we are saved to.

2. **Presence:** The Bread or Manna on offer here was not just a snack or even a four-course meal that leaves you stuffed and bloated: it was a heavenly portion to give earthy sustenance (He gave them bread from heaven to eat (6:31). As Psalm 78:25 puts it: 'Men ate the bread of angels; He sent them all the food they could eat.' Such presence was celebrated in the mobile temple/tent in the wilderness: it was given central place and called the bread of the presence (twelve loaves, one for each tribe). So can I suggest that the loaves in the feeding of the 5000 reflected that the issue on that day was not the physical hunger but the hunger the crowd (like today) had for the presence of the living God: Jesus was the Bread, so you could assume that 12 baskets left over meant that they feasted on Him rather than the bread itself!!!
3. **Provision:** 'Give us this day our daily bread' says Jesus. Manna was only for the day: leave it overnight and it goes off!! This prayer request is for necessities rather than luxuries, and the issue underlining it is: do I trust God to provide for me daily all I need? Proverbs 30:8 puts it cannily: 'Keep falsehood and lies far from me: give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread'. This issue of provision is a huge one, for most of us when pressed tend towards only trusting God when all else fails. He needs to be our first and last resort and all shades in-between: trust is the food of a dynamic relationship with Jesus and when you do this (surprise surprise) He doesn't let you down.
4. **Bread of Life:** This bread is living which is I suppose one of the ways that theologians took us from A to B in arguing that the Bread in Communion miraculously transforms into the Body of Jesus. Now I am sorry if this offends anyone but not only do I not believe in transubstantiation but I do believe it has created for Christians an alternative to the real thing: Jesus. The Bread that is used in communion is not special but symbolic and it becomes for us as we eat by faith a tangible reminder of His Body broken for me. As soon as it

becomes more than that it becomes a substitute for the real sustenance of the real life of Jesus: Bread of Life in person. As Isaiah says: Why spend your money on what is not bread (55:2)? You can't buy the Bread of Life: He comes by grace. You are not made more holy by how much you receive communion although it's good to do so. No ritual saves: it a sacrament, a means of grace (not the grace itself!!). As Jesus would say: do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you (6:27). So don't accept anything less than the real thing: For the Bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world (6:33). Note that the test is does it or he bring with it Life!! This Living Bread (6:35) will be the portion of all who freely come to Jesus: belief and faith will bring an end to hunger and thirst in a spiritual sense. Such claims made for a reaction in Jesus' day (from the Jews 6:41) and they still get a reaction today because it cuts out the intermediary, the religious middle man, the denominational loyalty, and says that relationship with Him and being part of His worldwide family is the key alone. John 6:51: *says* "I am the Living Bread that comes down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world". This maybe is where the Communion theology comes (Bread, body and cross are brought together) from but we should all note that its Jesus the person that we feed on by faith every minute of every day rather than in some kind of miraculous transformation suggested in Communion.

- 5. This is the day of Fresh Bread:** The book of Ruth is an amazing story of redemption (salvation and gospel before its time). Ruth's unswerving commitment to her mother-in-law Naomi is centre stage. Naomi & husband left Bethlehem because of famine and moved to Moab. Naomi's husband dies and her two sons marry two Moabite girls, and then the two sons also die. We are not told how they died but the famine is often mentioned. They then hear that "The Lord had come to the aid of His people by providing food for them" (Ruth 1:6). Bethlehem had food again. Ruth & Naomi eventually return and

the rest as they say is history. Now here's the fascinating play on words: Bethlehem in Hebrew mean House of Bread: there had been no bread in the House of Bread and now there was Fresh Bread in the House of Bread. I believe that the Church in this nation has been through a prolonged period of spiritual famine (no bread in the House of Bread) but now there is Fresh Bread and its for all, even for someone who does not quite fit like a Moabite women called Ruth!! So to you all the Lord says today: embrace me as Bread of Life, and experience the Fresh Bread of my Presence today: allow it to fill and animate your whole being as you embrace me as Lover of your Soul. If your relationship with me has become stale like Bread then help yourself to fresh Bread, fresh experiences of me and with me, and fresh adventures as you: Cast your Bread upon the waters (Ecc. 11:1) of your unique mission field and see what I will do winsomely to draw others to myself.

The Bible culminates with a feast not just of 'fresh bread' but also of the marriage of He who is 'Bread of Life' to His Bride, the Church. Jesus has been romancing His Bride ever since her birth @ Pentecost - so feed on Him alone who is the Lover of your soul and be part of the ever-growing number of souls who are the Bride of Christ, the Church.

So by all means cry out saying Bread of Heaven, Bread of Heaven, feed me now and evermore but don't settle for less than the real thing Jesus!!

Pastor David

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