

Intro

We are in the second Sunday of Lent and are still following the Holy Habits resource: Following Jesus. Last week the theme was “Serving Jesus”, and this week is then is Jesus is sharing bread.

Breaking bread

In the gospel the phrase ‘breaking bread’ is used. What do you imagine with ‘breaking bread’? It is strange in a way, as in our current culture we do not bread bread any more. We now cut it into slices. We so proud this that we compare anything new to this achievement: ‘the greatest thing since sliced bread’.

We have stopped breaking bread in our daily meals. And breaking bread is quite hard. When I am asked to serve communion and are asked to break a loaf, then invariable someone has cut a cross in the top, so that it is easy to break. Also during communion, I will break a small piece of bread symbolically. So we may associate the breaking of bread immediately with Communion. As this is the most likely place that we ever break bread.

But for the people in the time of Jesus, breaking bread was the only way you would share bread between each other. Breaking it and tearing pieces of and giving it to each other. (You may even think immediately: “I hope they washed their hands!”, and probably not...). So, sharing bread was an effort that happened on a daily basis. It was something that everyone did together, probably a few times a day. It was what you did as a family or as friends coming together – it has associations with home, family, friendship, fellowship. It was a normal act in the family but not with 5,000 people!

Different occurrences

The feeding of the 5,000 is the only one of Jesus’ miracles that is reported in all four gospels, and in Mark and Matthew there is a second feeding of 4,000. Last year in August we looked at Matthew feeding of the 5,000, and we looked a bit closer at the miracle at that times. But this time, I want to look at the story from what Jesus told the disciples: “You give them something to eat”.

You give them something to eat

In Luke’s version, the disciples come to Jesus and tell him to send the people away. A little bit before this reading we have seen that Jesus wanted to spend time with his disciples, as they had just returned from a mission trip (v9:1 Jesus called

the disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to heal), and he wanted to hear their stories. But a crowd followed them and Jesus welcomed the crowd and spoke to them about the Kingdom of God and healed those who needed healing.

And when the day grew late the disciples came: “send them away!” Were they interested in the well-being of the crowd? Or were they wanting to get Jesus’ full attention and this was a good excuse to get him by themselves? They were probably brimming over with stories and questions for Jesus, and they had not had a change to share it with him. They wanted exclusive fellowship with him. They had enough food for just themselves and they wanted their family time with Jesus. They wanted to break bread with him, so that he could give them his fullest attention. They may also have wanted to look for some normality, some comfort, as their journeys and missions must have been difficult. They just wanted to come home to Jesus and be home with him.

But Jesus breaks their expectations as he then commanded them: “You give them something to eat”.

They had been send out and given power and authority over demons and to cure diseases, and they were charged with proclaiming God’s Kingdom and to heal. And now they are charged with “You give them something to eat”. Is that harder or easier?

They found it harder. And what do you do as a disciple of Jesus when you find things hard? You look to Jesus. And the first thing Jesus asks is what have you got? (or to put it in another way: what have I already given you?). Five loaves and two fishes.

And then the miracle happens. Jesus had the people sat down, and then, just like he would do at home, he looked up to heaven, gave thanks to his Father for the provision, and then he broke the bread and the fish. After the disciples distributed these all were satisfied and twelve baskets with pieces were leftover.

What is the miracle?

The miracle of course is that the bread and the fish are multiplied – And Jesus is King over nature and under the power of the Holy Spirit he could do this.

But there is another miracle here. What emotions do you think these people would have felt? The giving thanks and the breaking of bread – what they all did in their own homes/family/friends. And here they are with 5,000 men (plus women and children) and Jesus is inviting them to his table ... to his home. The people who were a crowd not only witnessed a miracle of duplication, but they were welcomed as if they came in Jesus' home. He broke bread with them, he welcomed them, he taught them, he healed them.... And they were at home with him.

Application

I think there are a few applications here for us.

1. *Exclusivity*. I am sure we don't mean it this way, but are we similar to disciples? Do we want to spend time with Jesus on our own as a church family? The time will come that we can come back and worship in the church. We will all sigh a breath of relief and come together as a church family and worship together. Finally, we are at home with him! Hooray! And how would we respond when Jesus says: but out there there are 5,000 more people: give them something to eat! Make them part of the home that I have made for you. It is large enough!

2. *Sharing.* The great commandment in Matthew 28:16-20, refers to the disciples to teach new disciples to do everything I have commanded you. Are we like the disciples focused on wanting to proclaim the Kingdom of God, but not so much on 'You give them something to eat'. How would we fulfil the latter command as St Andrews or as Christians together in Canterbury? At least when we meet people that need something to eat, we are probably meeting those who need Jesus too... just like the 5,000.

3. *Eating together.* How do we foster our fellowship and friendship? By eating together. We will have communion later, and in this way we will eat and drink together (at least virtually). But Mark and Caroline are organising another virtual meal: eating a jacket potato on Friday 26th of March. Even though this is over Zoom it is important to share meals together – and can we do more of this when we are back to a new normality? And who can we invite? Do you have a lonely neighbour or friend you can invite to even this virtual meal? It is easier, as we do not need to cook and serve them. Ask God: who can I ask.

Personally I must admit that I find it hard to share my home and my food with other people, I like my alone time and I like my creature comforts. And maybe Jesus did too... but he

knew he had to do this in order to proclaim the gospel. But if we find this difficult then maybe our prayer should also be that God changes us to find this enjoyable! But if we find this hard, because it is not in our nature, maybe we should also look to Jesus to help us – just like the disciples did.

Last Sunday evening at Cafe Church (as you may have seen in the newsletter) we were challenged to proclaim to ourselves and each other ““Do not remember the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth; do you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert *of Canterbury and Littlebourne.*”

Maybe the first step on the road in the wilderness is to share hospitality with one another and the first tributary to the river in the desert is to share bread with strangers.

Amen.