

## **SERMON FOR ORDINARY SUNDAY 17 B BIRKENHEAD 2018**

There is enough food in the world to feed all the people of the world, we are often told. The problem is not about growing enough. The problem is about distribution. We hear of food being sent to countries with famine, only to find the food is not distributed because of the corruption of those who try to make money from the food and other people's misfortune. When one looks at nature one sees a huge abundance. The number of seeds plants produce is enormous. Growth is difficult to stop. Have you ever noticed how plants grow in the cracks in concrete? The power in these cells is enormous. Nature surely over does everything. Just wait until spring and you will see what I mean.

In the Gospel today there was not enough food, and there was a distribution problem. Even if there was enough bread, how could one distribute it to 5,000 people? Jesus said, Make the people sit down. I can't help thinking that too was a miracle. It showed great trust on the part of the people. They didn't know what Jesus was going to do. They simply trusted him. Maybe the greater miracle is not what Jesus gave the people, but what the people gave Jesus – their trust that he could help.

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The result of all this is that the people were fed. But there's even more than that. There were twelve baskets of food left over. Another miracle? Here we see the generosity and abundance of God.

And then, to go back to the beginning of the story, what has happened to the small boy who had his lunch confiscated. He must have wondered if he would get anything to eat when the adults took away his food. His sacrifice is well rewarded when he sees Jesus feed the people with the food he has provided. What the boy gave to Jesus, is given back totally transformed. Not only is the boy fed, but so is the crowd.

This sign that Jesus did is about sharing. It's about sharing resources in order that all people may have enough. We often think we haven't got enough. We think our resources are too small to do any good. Maybe if we concentrated more on the effects of what we do have we might be surprised at the result.

3

This is particularly true of the gifts we have been given; not just the material things but the abilities we have. At this stage of the parish's life the resources we have here are also the subject of our sharing. How can we best use what we have that it may be distributed for the good of all?

When Jesus was given the loaves and fish he gave thanks and gave them out to all who were sitting ready. Thankfulness for what we have increases the size of what we have. So it is that we bless God for this Eucharist, a meagre feed of bread and wine, but the abundance of God's love conveyed is incalculable.

Distribution of what we have, sharing of our gifts, thanking God for them, this is the secret of living this gospel. The twelve baskets left over, standing on the hillside, are the challenge to us to go and do the same.

There is a story which may help to illustrate our responsibilities.

4

A very old tale from India says there were once four foolish beggars, clothed in rags, who by chance met in a beggars hut near a small village. All day they had been holding out their begging bowls in the market place, begging food from those who moved to and fro. As the sun was setting and the shadows were lengthening, they limped to the hut. There they sat round a very small fire of sticks, all of them discontented and suspicious.

So there in the hut, as twilight deepened, the four foolish beggars talked and grumbled until one suggested that if they put water in the pot over the fire, and if each threw into it the contents of his own bowl, there would be enough broth for everyone.

The idea of enjoying a savoury supper was loudly acclaimed, and the pot having been filled with water, the beggars sat around eagerly.

But the first beggar, who thought himself a cunning fellow, realised that if the other three threw in spices, vegetables and rice, why there would be no need for him to share his little store of meat.

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So in the half light he pretended to drop his meat into the pot, afterwards chuckling to think that he would enjoy a tasty supper, and still have his meat all to himself.

As it happened, the second beggar did the same with his vegetables, the third with his spices, and the fourth with his rice, each pretending to throw everything he had into the common pot, all hiding their food under their rags.

They say there was no end of quarrelling in the beggar's hut that night when the pot was lifted off the fire, and nothing was found in it except hot water.

May we be thankful for all that we have received so that we are able to share. Then we will know the abundance that comes from such actions and the joy of being Christlike.