

2nd August 2020 6pm The Feeding of the 5,000: Compline

Service led by Felicity Hawke, meditation by Val Whiteman, reading by Ann Gibbons

This is only a copy of the reading and a transcript of the meditation.

Reading: Matthew 14:13-21 [NLT]

[Ann Gibbons:]

Jesus feeds the five thousand.

This [is] after He had heard of the death of John the Baptist.

¹³ As soon as Jesus heard the news, he left in a boat to a remote area to be alone. But the crowds heard where he was headed and followed on foot from many towns. ¹⁴ Jesus saw the huge crowd as he stepped from the boat, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

¹⁵ That evening the disciples came to him and said, “This is a remote place, and it’s already getting late. Send the crowds away so they can go to the villages and buy food for themselves.”

¹⁶ But Jesus said, “That isn’t necessary—you feed them.”

¹⁷ “But we have only five loaves of bread and two fish!” they answered.

¹⁸ “Bring them here,” he said. ¹⁹ Then he told the people to sit down on the grass. Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, looked up toward heaven, and blessed them. Then, breaking the loaves into pieces, he gave the bread to the disciples, who distributed it to the people. ²⁰ They all ate as much as they wanted, and afterward, the disciples picked up twelve baskets of leftovers. ²¹ About 5,000 men were fed that day, in addition to all the women and children!

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Meditation

[Val Whiteman:]

When I heard Penny’s talk this morning on this passage, it was really interesting. If you listened at 10 o'clock, this is I'm afraid the second time through the feeding of the 5,000 for today. And it's very interesting that we both picked up in totally different things.

There are parallel passages to this one and all the gospels, including John. So it's obviously important for us to understand what Jesus is saying through His actions and His life at this point. And I won't have time, obviously, to go through everything. So what I was thinking of was, one of the ways we can approach scripture is through Ignatian meditation, which basically means entering into the story imaginatively. Some people can do this very easily and they enjoy it, and other people absolutely hate it. So if you haven't tried it, maybe try it after the service at some time tonight. What you should do is, sit yourself quiet; read the story a couple of times so that you know it, it's familiar to you, so read it over so you can get it fixed in your head; and then choose a viewpoint: somebody in the story. You can be a bystander totally outside it if you want, or you could be one of the crowd, you could be a disciple, whatever you like. You choose where you tell the story from. And then you retell it from that viewpoint. You notice the details. You notice that people don't get on buses and cars. It's an awful long way to walk to where Jesus is. You get tired before you get there. You notice that it's dusty

underfoot, for example, but Mark says the grass is green, so maybe it's spring. You retell yourself this story. And when you get there, you realise that there are an awful lot of people there. There are 5,000 men, plus women and children. What do you think? Are they queuing nicely for Jesus to heal them? Are the disciples keeping order? There must have been an awful lot of noise.

And then comes the miracle. Now what I'd like to do at this point is to move into looking at the scene from the crowd's point of view. They don't know that Jesus was escaping to have some quiet time because His cousin had just been judicially murdered by Herod. They didn't know the authorities were ganging up. They didn't know the danger that Jesus must have felt Himself in.

So why did they come to see Jesus? Well, the motives must have been as various as the crowd. Some, I'm assuming, were sincere seekers who had heard about Jesus and wanted to know more, some desperate for healing. Some, possibly because there were a lot of men there, hoping for a revolution, because Jesus could be the Messiah, and He might be going to free them from the Roman yoke. Others possibly just plain nosy. "Somebody's going, so I'll go and find out too."

And then they have their meal, a surprise banquet. They had, it says, enough to eat: bread and fish. So the staple of life, but with a relish to it. So if you can imagine yourself one of the crowd, how do you feel after that? Again, the change is going to vary with individuals. Do you think it's a good day out? You know, a bit of a surprise but quite nice. Is it a life-changing encounter? Is it a real disappointment because you were expecting the Messiah to do wonderful things with a sword? Any or every nuance of change in between, I'm imagining. I'm assuming they didn't have access to the commentators that we do, who make links between the feeding of the 5,000 and the Last Supper, between this and the manna in desert that God provides, or even between this and the banquet at the end of the age. They probably didn't see Jesus even as the Creator God, as He is, who gives them, as He gives to all of us, sustenance for every day. So, what did they see?

And after you've imagined yourself into the passage, entered into it, we all are left with the same questions that the original crowd had. How did you understand what happened? Will it change you? I find it really interesting that God doesn't compel us to believe. He gives us the evidence of who Jesus is, but it's up to us to notice, up to us to make a response in faith. You may say after the service, "We had really good fellowship in the church this evening, I really felt part of the church;" or you may say, "I met with the living God, and things won't ever be the same for me again." I suppose partly it depends on whether we, all of us, spend time looking away from our own reactions to the reality of Christ who died and lives for us.

I always think of faith as a rather tender little plant, and we're always trying to dig it up and see how deep the roots are. And I think that's a **big** mistake. When I tried this meditation earlier in the week, I was unexpectedly hit by the sheer love of Jesus, for everyone, even the bystander I was imagining myself to be.

So let's pray that we may be able to, as it were, step away from ourselves this week, and focus on Christ in the coming week. Let's ask Him to let us do that by the power of His Spirit within us.

Amen.

[Transcribed by Hamish Blair with help from <https://otter.ai>]

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