

Time for God – Take 2

Purpose: To assist the congregation with further reflection on the theme of the Sunday service and in particular with the Congregational Bible passage.

Week beginning Sunday 30 July 2017

More than a picnic

Pray Thank God that he gives us food and that unlike many in the world most of us are not going to be really hungry. Ask him for the ability not to take this for granted and to play our part in supporting those who are truly in need and to campaign for food justice.

Read Read the passage (preferably in an easy to understand version). Matthew 14:13-21.

Background The feeding of the 5000 is a very well known story that is given to us several times. Looking at it is likely to raise fresh thoughts and lessons on re-reading. It is important that we are open to such lessons each time. Jesus is becoming a person who is more and more in the public eye, people are open to his teaching but suspicion and criticism comes his way too. His plan to withdraw to a quiet place for rest and spiritual refreshment was somewhat frustrated when the crowds followed him round. However, his compassion comes to the fore and he gives people his time and attention. He does take the initiative in feeding people but he also lays considerable responsibility upon his disciples – we need to ask ourselves what responsibility is ours in our day and age?

Possible questions/points to consider

1. How do we respond when we are under pressure? Overworked? Particularly if other people's expectations of us are high and possibly beyond our capacity to deliver? How important is rest and relaxation? How important are the opportunities to have spiritual refreshment? If Jesus needed them so do we! How do we cope with pressures from others? Are we likely to respond differently if there is a spiritual element?
2. Jesus' friends tried to protect him. What are the pluses and minuses of this? How do we balance our obligations to God, to others, to ourselves? How can we make ourselves more aware of the pressures our fellow Christians are under without being intrusive? Someone once said "you are not indispensable, none of us is" – how do we avoid the trap to act as though we were or pile things on others as though they were?
3. The disciples came to Jesus urging him to send the crowds away to get something to eat. Possibly they feared that they would be held responsible for feeding them (teachers often were expected to feed their students, though they would expect to be paid to teach) and clearly humanly speaking they didn't have the resources. Jesus said "you give them something to eat". Did he mean that literally? Did he expect them to think outside the box and use their faith to deal with things? What do you think?
4. Jesus worked a miracle however it was achieved – and just to rub home the generosity of God many baskets of leftovers were collected too. I don't think that the miracle was simply God working in people's hearts to generously share the food they had brought with them though I expect there was some of that. The crowds and indeed Jesus' disciples learned a good deal more about just who Jesus was from this incident. What questions would you have had had you been there to see the feeding for yourself? What questions do you have now about what this says about Jesus?
5. I expect that the disciples had their eyes opened to see that there was a whole lot more to Jesus than met the eye. How open are we to continually learn more about Jesus? How do we avoid falling into the trap of assuming that we have him "pretty well taped".
6. What issues are there for poverty, famine and food justice? What does it say to us about the appropriate responses we ought to be making?
7. Anything else arising from the service or the passage?

Prayer Lord, thank you that you give us your attention, that you are still concerned about food for our stomachs and our spirits. Help us to know how to respond in faith. Amen.