

OPENING PRAYER

Lord you are the bread of heaven, giving life to the world. You fill our emptiness with your goodness. You come to our weakness with your strength. Help us to remember to call upon your name. Come, refresh, renew, restore us, Jesus Christ our Lord, who with the father and the Holy Spirit lives in glory everlasting. **Amen.**

Isaiah 55:1-5

Invitation to the Thirsty

“Come, all you who are thirsty,
 come to the waters;
and you who have no money,
 come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
 without money and without cost.

Why spend money on what is not bread,
 and your labour on what does not satisfy?
Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,
 and you will delight in the richest of fare.

Give ear and come to me;
 listen, that you may live.
I will make an everlasting covenant with you,
 my faithful love promised to David.

See, I have made him a witness to the peoples,
 a ruler and commander of the peoples.

Surely you will summon nations you know not,
 and nations you do not know will come running to you,
because of the Lord your God,
 the Holy One of Israel,
 for he has endowed you with splendour.”

PERHAPS YOU WOULD LIKE TO TAKE A MOMENT TO FOLLOW THE LINK BELOW AND LISTEN TO THE WORSHIP SONG ON YOU TUBE, “ALL WHO ARE THIRSTY”.

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=oCwDtSFMjdw>

Matthew 14:13-21 New International Version

Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand

When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

As evening approached, 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 themselves some food.”

Jesus replied, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.”

“We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,” they answered.

“Bring them here to me,” he said. And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

REFLECTION

When we hear a familiar bible story, like this feeding of the five thousand, it is so easy to relegate it to a story from long, long ago, in a far-off country. We can forget that it is relevant to our lives here in Newcastle in the 21c.

This story was considered so important it was included in all four Gospels because it not only shows the spiritual and practical nature of God's provision but is clearly a story challenging the politics of the day.

In the 1c Roman Empire there were significant inequalities in food access. Many knew food insecurities and struggled on a daily and seasonal basis for adequate food and nutrition, whilst the elite enjoyed abundance and variety. This is not so different from today where we see rising use of food banks

Food-bank use has soared at a higher rate than ever in the past year as welfare benefits fail to cover basic living costs. This was rising even before the Corona Virus. Figures from the Trussell Trust show that in the year to March 2018, 1,332,952 three-day emergency food supplies were delivered to people in crisis across the UK – a 13 per cent increase on last year. (The Independent 24/04/2020). And those carers we all clapped for, well more than 100,000 carers, are forced to use food bank to survive. (Guardian 16/06/2020).

To emphasize the structural inequalities in society, in the previous twelve lines of Mathews Gospel (chapter 14:1-12) we are given the stark contrast of the opulence of Herod's birthday party. A party representing Imperial power and a death delivering meal, where the head of John the Baptist, is served up on a platter. A powerful comparison to the life-giving feast, embodying the gracious abundance of God, where all are fed.

I find it interesting that when the disciples saw the need facing this hungry crowd far from home, they reacted in such a realistic and human way. Send them away, we haven't the resources to deal with this! And Jesus' challenging answer, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." In horror the disciples answered but, "We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish".

I don't know about you, but when I am faced with mountains of plastic in our oceans, camps full of refugees, overstretched food banks, broken homeless people, the pandemic engulfing our world, I generally feel pretty useless and think what on earth can I do, what difference will my paltry donation to Oxfam make ?

But in this Gospel, we are told that Jesus asked the disciples to take up the challenges that are right in front of their very eyes and offer up to him what little they have, which is not very much at all. It is a humble offering, some Gospels describe the bread as Barley Loaves, food of the poor, and little fishes akin to Sardines. A humanly and totally inadequate offering to feed 5,000 plus people. Bring this insufficient little that you have to me, says Jesus and look what I can do with it. What a lesson for us, when we make our attempts at On Line services, or to set up a prayer space. Little things which God will use to grow His Kingdom in ways we cannot imagine. Look at the Forget me Not planting, who knows how this will grow. Did it happen because of our prayer bench? I don't know, but God will grow His Kingdom with whatever we can offer.

Each one of us has something to give to God no matter how small and inadequate that may seem and this all becomes the more powerful when we call on the name of Jesus and come together to work as a community. There is power in community, for none of us can do life alone. Despite our current obsession with individualism and independence, biology and anthropology show us that from the very beginning of the evolutionary process species have worked together in mutually beneficial ways to survive. We need each other to feed, clothe, heal, comfort, house, employ, educate, etc. If the pandemic has shown us anything it is our need for caring and loving human contact.

Dorothy Day (1897-1980) the founder of The Catholic Worker in her book, Loaves and Fishes says, "Young people say, 'What good can one person do? What is the sense of our small effort? They cannot see we must lay one brick at a time, take one step at a time, we can only be responsible for the one action of the present moment. But we can beg for an increase of love in our hearts that will vitalise and transform all our individual actions and know that God will take them and multiply them".

Maybe you can ask God to show you what little thing you can do and give to Him to multiply? Or maybe we can as a Church all do a short training in Listening Skills so we can really listen to those around us? Or maybe we can all join a sustainable ethical food group to buy plastic free products at a fraction of supermarket prices and give back to our community? (see www.societycompany.co.uk).

So, let us remember to offer what little we have, let us offer this to Jesus, call upon his name and then let us be amazed at what He will do with our equivalent of barley loaves and little fishes! **Amen.**

Amazing Grace

PRAYERS: LORD HELP US TO REMEMBER TO CALL UPON YOUR NAME.

Give thanks to the Lord:

Call upon His name.

Loving God, we pray that your church may hunger and thirst after righteousness. May your church seek to care for and feed the hungry in body and spirit.

May we seek out the lost, and those in desert places, and offer them sustenance for body and soul, because you ensure none go hungry from your banquet.

We pray for Bible study groups and our outreach through the prayer space outside, the forget-me not garden, our children's work, our on- line presence, and for each one of us as we share our faith with friends, neighbours and strangers.

Give thanks to the Lord:

Call upon His name.

Loving God, we remember before you the starving and hungry peoples of this world. We think of those in our own country who need to rely on food banks and those throughout this world suffering from famine, war, living in refugee camps, and crossing our oceans seeking safety and security. Let the harvests of our world be neither hoarded or squandered.

Stir leaders and governments to change structures that impoverish and lead to destitution. Forgive and overturn injustice whatever form it takes.

Give thanks to the Lord:

Call upon His name.

Loving God we pray for all whose lives are fragmented, for all who are broken, torn apart by grief, anxiety and loss or suffering because of the crisis facing our world. Strengthen and uphold those who are suffering.

Bless our loved ones, our homes and our communities. Fill our deep longing for you with your presence and your peace. When we are overwhelmed by the enormity of need in our world help us to remember to call upon your name.

We ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Let us go in the power of the Holy Spirit to love and serve our Lord. **Amen.**

If you would like to take this further follow the link below to a Jesuit resource on Sound-Cloud which has a short series of reflections. Number 3 is about Jesus as the bread of life.

<https://soundcloud.com/pray-as-you-go/sets/pray-as-you-stay-week-2>