

Sermon: St Andrew, Corbridge, , Evening Prayer: All Souls' Day 2018.

Title: 'That nothing may be lost'

Text: John 6.12, 13

May the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts be now and always acceptable in your sight, O Lord our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Earlier this afternoon we held our annual All Souls'-tide Service of Remembrance for the bereaved families to whom we have ministered over the last year. And so, I would like to reflect on the reality of our mortality in the light of the gospel. Tonight's second lesson, the account of the Feeding of the 5,000 from St John's Gospel, might not at first reading seem to relate to the reality of human loss. Let me read the conclusion:

When they were satisfied, Jesus told his disciples, 'Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost'. So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets (John 6. 12, 13).

In the Church's calendar, All Saints' Day is followed by All Souls' Day. The two festivals are closely related but with a different emphasis. All Saints' Day is a joyful celebration of the joy of heaven. Traditionally, at Holy Communion we wear gold or white vestments. Gold or white reminds us of fulfilment, consummation, the Church triumphant, the glorious reuniting of all God's holy ones in the bliss of the new creation. For All Souls' Day, the liturgical colour is normally violet. Violet reminds us of loss, of separation, of the pain of parting, of the power of death to hurt us and diminish us – '...send not to know for whom the bell tolls – it tolls for thee' (John Donne). Violet reminds us that God's ultimate purposes are not yet fulfilled. We live by faith, not by sight.

Tonight we hold in our hearts those whom we love but see no longer. Many people in our community have experienced loss during the past year, perhaps you have. The first All Souls' Day is poignant indeed, and yet, today always takes me back through most of my life as I remember family, friends, members of my various congregations who have died, and for whom I light candles and whisper their names. We never forget because we believe God never forgets.

And that is why I offer you that text from St John. It gives us a remarkable insight into Jesus. Not only is he the one who feeds super-abundantly; not only is he the source of all nourishment, but he shows a concern that nothing should be lost. He commands that the fragments should be brought together. The broken and gathered bread symbolises separation and re-uniting. It shows a divine conviction that that nothing is ever wasted, a divine pledge that what is discarded, seemingly finished with, is somehow brought back together again.

You see behind John 6 is the Passover. Jesus is one who is greater than Moses, who feeds God's people in the wilderness with bread from heaven. Jesus is the one who brings true deliverance, who has come among us to release us from slavery, and not just any slavery, but the ultimate slavery of sin and to death. He is the Passover Lamb, who is sacrificed for

us, whose blood saves us from the consequences of eternal death, who brings us safely through the Red Sea, who leads us to the Promised Land.

You see, when the fragments were collected, how many baskets-full were gathered? Two, six, ten? No, it was *twelve* baskets, to symbolise the Twelve Tribes of Israel, themselves a symbol of God's people from every nation, language, tribe and people. The twelve baskets represent the re-uniting of the scattered people of God, so that nothing is wasted, so that nothing is lost, so that *no-one* is lost of all the Good Shepherd is gathering to himself.

If you read on in John 6, Jesus says to us:

And this is the will of him who sent me that I should lose *nothing* of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.

'That I should lose nothing of all that he has given me'. 'Gather up the fragments, so that nothing may be lost'.

I often say that when a loved one dies, all that dies is what must die; in other words those parts of us that are not able to inherit the Kingdom of God. Yes, our perishable flesh and blood, and those parts of our human nature that fall short of the light of heaven. But all that is good, wise, beautiful, godly, holy; all our giftedness and acumen; all that is loveable and for which we love other human beings, all the gifts that God himself has given – all of that is gathered so that nothing is lost. And that is what helps us to live hopefully, and to believe and look expectantly, for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

Always remember that Christ Jesus our Lord is the one who not only feeds us super-abundantly, but reunites us with all who have gone before us, so that nothing is lost. Nothing is lost, for he will raise it up on the last day.

When they were satisfied, Jesus told his disciples, 'Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost. So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. (John 6. 12, 13)