

Wednesday reflection on Matthew 15. 32-39 The Feeding of the 4,000

Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion for the crowd because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat, and I do not want to send them away hungry, for they might faint on the way." ³³The disciples said to him, "Where are we to get enough bread in the desert to feed so great a crowd?" ³⁴Jesus asked them, "How many loaves have you?" They said, "Seven, and a few small fish." ³⁵Then ordering the crowd to sit down on the ground, ³⁶he took the seven loaves and the fish, and after giving thanks he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. ³⁷And all of them ate and were filled, and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. ³⁸Those who had eaten were four thousand men, besides women and children. ³⁹After sending away the crowds, he got into the boat and went to the region of Magadan.

There are so many important truths about Jesus from this reading.

We see his *compassion* - the crowd was large. This is the feeding of the 4,000 not the 5,000, but that number is only the men – there would have been many women and children as well. And some were needy, some sick; it seems all of them were hungry to hear about God. Jesus shows his care for them.

We see Jesus' *generosity* – they had been with Jesus for 3 whole days in the desert listening to him teach. Jesus must have been exhausted. And I wonder, where did the crowds sleep over those three days? And then there is the question of food.

We see Jesus *challenging* his disciples. He tells them he doesn't want to send the crowd away hungry, lest they faint on the way. The text kind of implies that he was inviting the disciples to do something about it. But the disciples are dumb-founded – 'Where can we get enough bread in this desert to feed such a crowd?' It's crazy.

We see Jesus' *acceptance* of the little the disciples could offer – 7 loaves and a few fish. He gave thanks to God, and then broke and gave.

We see that Jesus was *God-orientated* – he took that food, and raised his eyes to heaven, and gave thanks to God, and then broke and gave.

And we see so many insights into who Jesus is.

We see Jesus as a *new and greater Moses* who fed the Israelites in the desert with Manna, the bread of heaven.

We see Jesus as a *new and greater Elisha*, who fed 100 people with bread.

We see Jesus the *universal source of nourishment* – they people are entirely filled; Jesus feeds his people by his teaching and by giving them bread and fish.

We see Jesus as the one who is *gathering together the scattered children of God* – there were seven baskets-full left – the number seven for the Jews denoted perfection and completeness; Jesus is gathering into one all God's children, Jew and Gentile.

We see Jesus as the one who *assures us of our ultimate future* – the Old Testament speaks of the great Feast of the Kingdom of God in which people will come from north and south and east and west and sit down at Messiah's Table in the age to come. This miracle anticipates that reality.

But, we can go even further.

You see, in a real sense, *Jesus himself is the Bread*, he feeds us physically and spiritually. He feeds us abundantly and to over-flowing.

He is the *living bread*, in whom all our hungers are satisfied.

He is the *one who transforms* – whatever we bring to him, whatever we place in his hands, including ourselves – he takes with thanksgiving and breaks and gives again.

The Feeding of the 4,000 should make stop in awe and wonder. Something deeply mysterious is going on. Poverty is turned to riches, scarcity to abundance, hunger to satisfaction, a foretaste of heaven is seen on earth. And it still goes on.

When we give Jesus our lives and our gifts; when we give money to charity or gifts to a foodbank, or education to those denied it, or justice to those oppressed, or friendship to a stranger – through the hands of Jesus, all these things are multiplied.

And today he feeds us with this bread – this bread of life and this wine, the royal wine of heaven.

So, in this Advent season, as we look for Jesus' coming in our midst, pray, give, serve with these convictions in your hearts, and Jesus will do the rest.

