

# All Saints Talk

Sunday 26 February 2023

## Adrian Youings 'Be satisfied'

Luke 9:10-17 and Matthew 14:13-21

Yesterday I checked that I had everything for my talk today only to discover that All Saints were doing a series in Luke and I prepared a sermon on the feeding of the 5000, from Matthew. And I was going out and it was too late to do anything about it. So I sent a message to Tom, who was incredibly gracious and said, Well, why don't we have both readings? Because they're subtly different on my whole first point relies on the Matthew version and not the Luke version. So can you tolerate hearing the same but from just a different perspective?

'So when Jesus heard what had happened, and what had happened was that John the Baptist had been beheaded. When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowd followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, and healed those who were ill. 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 says. And he told 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 we're satisfied. And the disciples picked up 12 basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about 5000 Men, besides women, and children.'

Loving Heavenly Father, please, would you open our eyes, that we might behold wonderful things in your Word this morning. And by your Holy Spirit melt our hearts and mould our wills, that we might live in humble obedience to all that we read, in Jesus precious name we pray. Amen.

We simply don't have the resources. We haven't got the money. This project is simply too big. It is beyond us. It's impossible. This is madness. I imagined that might well have been the conversation going on in the background as Jesus announces to His disciples a crazy plan to not send a hungry crowd off to the village shops to pick up some food because it's too late in the day, but rather to feed them with whatever resources they have available to them. 'This is madness', the disciples must have muttered. This is so stupid: five loaves to fish, there are 5000 men and then look at their wives and the children, there must be 24,000 people on this hillsides. We simply don't have the resources, we haven't got the money. This project is simply too big and it's beyond us. It's impossible. This is madness. It's also what I remember being told by some in my church and community. When God gave some of us a vision for a new church community centre in our small Somerset village where I was the vicar before I became Archdeacon. A project that the village had started and gave up on three times, because the resources never came. A project that funnily enough, would cost 1 million pounds. A project that we felt God had said the church family needed to do on behalf of the village without seeking lottery funding. Indeed, we only got 90,000 pounds from grants that felt like a packed lunch compared to the size of the projects. But in one year, to the day, the money was all raised, all 1 million pounds. In one year, the builders moved in the village watched on and they saw a miracle they couldn't explain. As did those disciples and crowds that light evening on the side of a mountain.

How do these kind of miracles happen? Three things that I notice in Matthew's version of the feeding of the 5000; the first is this, keep praying, keep praying. As I was writing this sermon I sent a message to a friend of mine. I asked, Are you busy today? She replied, No, I'm not busy at all. And then she wrote this: I'm spending time just being with Jesus. It's been too long. I thought wow. When was the last time, you could have sent a message to me and I'd have said that 'now I'm just spending some time with Jesus'. When's the last time you just spent time with Jesus? See,

that's how this passage begins and ends, with Jesus taking some space to be alone to contemplate and to pray, to be with his heavenly Father, verse 13, and verse 21. We're told he desires to get away from the crowds, away from the disciples, so that he can linger in prayer. That's what the verb actually said to linger in prayer. Charles Wesley's wife was called Sarah, do you know the story of Charles Wesley's wife? Her preacher, husband was away a lot. And by all accounts, he wasn't much of a husband either. She had 10 children. Each day, she would throw her apron over her head, a sign to the kids that for the next two hours, she was having time with Jesus. The kids had to look after themselves for that time, she was not to be disturbed. She was resetting her spiritual compass and refilling her spiritual energy reserves so she could face another busy day. If Jesus needed it, if Sarah need it, you can be certain that we need it. But especially when you're being called on to fulfill a vision that God has given to you. You've got a big vision that Tom's just talked about this big ROCK project. Even more when you've got a vision, and a calling to respond to, even more we need to be rooted in prayer. You see, that's the point here, I think, at the end of verse 12, John the Baptist has been beheaded. And his disciples have buried the body and come and they've told Jesus, Jesus hears of John's death, and he must, therefore have wanted some solitude, just to come to terms with it, he's human, as well as God's. We mustn't forget that he felt pain and he felt grief, he probably needed some space to grieve, and perhaps weep, just as he did at the grave of Lazarus, his friend. But maybe also, as he's reflecting on the death of John, he began to reflect on his own future that lay ahead. Jesus would face what John had, and seeking to live out the calling of God, he too, would face suffering and death at the hands of political powers of his day. Maybe in that place of solitude, he contemplated the cost, the pain of the coming days, maybe also, he had to draw again on his Father's of strength and resources. Maybe he had to commit himself once again to doing, not what he wanted, but what his father wanted of him.

You know, the danger of being All Saints, Church, Weston is, you're a busy church. When we all read the profile before Tom was appointed, most of us are quite exhausted, having read the profile, because there was so much going on. Now, of course, that's wonderful, but it's dangerous as well, isn't it? You see, if you're seeking to fulfill the call of God, raise whatever it is 1.8 million pounds, and yet you're so busy, the danger is you won't linger to pray. I remember being asked by people in their village, how will you raise that money? And I simply answered every time we

will pray and ask God to provide and then we will ask people to give sacrificially in response to Jesus's sacrifice for us. I said it every time. Jesus's ability to give his life sacrificially depended on him taking the time to be with his Father, seeking the strength to be obedience, seeking from him the willingness to pay the cost. Spending time, being willing to hear again, the call of the Father, to do whatever it takes to be obedient and that starts on our knees. Costly, sacrificial miracles take prayer, so, keep praying. Secondly, keep caring. It's interesting to see, isn't it that because Jesus spends time in prayer, reflecting on his own self sacrifice, to come on the cross, Jesus suddenly demonstrates extraordinary compassion. He selflessly loves the tired, the poor, the huddled masses, those longing to be free, and longing to be fed. You see, I imagine what I'd have been like if I was Jesus. Desperate for time alone, and yet I get out of the boat and I'm hit by a tidal wave of people crashing in around me. You see, I would have been annoyed. I would have been frustrated. I would have been impatient. This is my time, me time, go away.

But not Jesus. Verse 14, he says, where here we see the heart of God laid bare before us. Jesus. sees the great crowd and were told he had compassion on them, and healed their sick, and filled their bellies. He had compassion on them. Literally it means his heart went out to them. And then his hands, healed them and fed them. He didn't just have an attitude of compassion. But it was followed by acts of compassion. It's all too easy to see the needs of others, to feel awful about it, and yet do nothing. Even worse, to be so absorbed with what's going on, maybe a big building project, but we forget people. We forget what it's really all about.

Fran and I had a very sobering moment about three years ago during COVID. You may remember that Laura Ashley as a company collapsed. And we were at Bath, Laura Ashley, in just the weeks before it was about to finally close, it had gone into administration, there was a 60% sale and in those last few weeks, an extra 20% off. So we stood in the queue, chatting to the lady who was counting us in; it was still COVID and only a few people could go in at a time. And we were chatting about when it would close, we're chatting about the bargains, we were excited, we love a bargain in our house. And then we had that dawning realisation that this poor lady counting and us in was about to lose her job. It was embarrassing. Here, we were excited about how we would benefit from the demise of Laura Ashley, and yet this lady would soon be out of a job. And that was a massive wake up call to both of us.

We were so embarrassed at our attitudes. The danger for a church that is busy and that gets focused on a building project, is we forget why people put us here. We have to be reminded time and again that we were not building a great memorial to the vicar, Adrian Ewing's to sit at the centre of Troll Village. The building was nothing. It was all about what can we do in this building. It's about people. It's about a world out there that desperately needs to know the gospel and experience the gospel to hear the good news and experience the good news that's why I love your title 'Be good news'. It's vital as a church you keep being people focused and not yet Christian focused. To remember how Jesus wants looks over Jerusalem and wept. This is a state of our world. It's homelessness. It's mental health issues, drugs, domestic violence, which is we're told is on the increase. Does it move us? Do our hearts go out? And then once our hearts go out, do our hands and our money and our time go out in real compassion. You see, when doing the ROCK project, don't ever forget that it's about people. It doesn't matter what it looks like at the end, what can you use it for to make a difference in people's lives. And then lastly, keep praying. Keep caring. Keep confidence in Christ.

You see, there are great lessons here for us about being prayerful, about being more compassionate. But the central lesson of the feeding of the 5000 is this. The shocking truth is that yes, this man, Jesus Christ really did take five loaves and two fish and feed 24,000 people with it, and everyone went home with a doggie bag with enough in there to feed them for the rest of the week. It really happened, he really did it. It is unbelievable, mind blowing, and it's meant to be. For there is no other explanation, other than Jesus is God in flesh. Jesus is the sovereign Lord of Creation. The one who spun the stars into existence in a blink of an eye, now changes the non existent into the existent. One loaf and one fish at a time becomes two, becomes four, becomes eight, becomes enough for 24,000 people. You see this actual incident I think is a lesson in discipleship for the followers of Jesus. It is a lesson to those who would mutter: 'we simply don't have the resources, we haven't got the money, this project is simply too big, it's beyond us, it's impossible, it's madness. Jesus says: Do you trust me? Do you really believe that nothing is impossible for God, do you? Because that is the heart of discipleship. Do you believe it and you believe it enough to act on it? I remember vividly the key moment in the progress of our building project. Early on when the project was conceived, it was actually a dream that I woke up with. I don't have big dreams like that normally. We formed a small group of people, including

people from the village who weren't Christians, just a small group. We talked, some of us prayed and we discerned together. We felt right from the beginning this was right. And one of the small group was a lady whose son was a Christian. He was also a hedge fund manager, one of the biggest in the world, he was loaded. He was also generous. We knew that the year before he had paid in full for a new church centre for a church somewhere down in Sussex. Also, he was currently funding the building of a library at his old school. He was on 'songs of praise', talk about Christian philanthropy. The Financial Times reported about him that he gave away 3 million pounds of his own money each year to Christian causes. His mum said to me, 'Adrian, I'll talk to him, he might be interested in helping us.' He came down. He gave all noises. I felt slightly uncomfortable, something didn't seem, but anyway, I thought to myself, Wow, this is amazing. I can go and take this vision to the church. This is going to cost me nothing. Guess what? I've got the money. What a joy that was going to be. It's all paid for. This was in 2008. His hedge fund had just bought big into Northern Rock. Remember what happened? Northern Rock collapsed. There was a financial crash. It wipes out this hedge fund. This man could give us not one penny. I heard God say to me as clear as day, and I don't hear God like this very often. I heard him say this 'Youngs, this is not how we're doing this. This project is about discipleship. It is not about the building. This is a project about how I'm going to grow faith in this church. And we will do it my way and not yours.' And do you know, we started to believe and have faith. Villagers kept asking us, how you're going to do this? And we kept saying we will pray and give and we believe God will provide. Can I tell you that's scary to tell a village that's watching. Because if it doesn't happen, you look right lemon at the end of it. Just imagine the disciples shouting out to the crowds, 'Hey, guys, it's fine. We're gonna feed all 24,000 of you, ya know, we've only got two five loaves and two fish. It's all fine.' And I kind of imagine the kind of corporate whole crowd, you know, eyebrow goes up, smirk, yeah, really? That's what it was like in our village. But just imagine what it must be like for disciples to kind of tentatively start handing out and thinking, Gosh, this is gonna run out guys. This is gonna run out. This is never gonna work. And yet somehow keeps still keeps still working. I mean, can you imagine physically what that must have been like, for them to have the guts to start to walk around that crowd and start to feed them? That is discipleship. Will you believe Jesus? And will you ask them what Jesus says?

Somehow we raised 1 million pounds. So all of that, bar 90,000 pounds, came from a sacrificial giving of a little village church congregation just on the edge of Taunton. It was a miracle. It didn't all come early. I remember on Christmas day we were due to give a finance update. One year after the launch if we hadn't reached the target, then we would have had to delay on the cost would have gone up. We needed 1 million pounds pledged by that Easter Sunday in order for the builders to start. On Good Friday, a year after the launch. I was at the service and the treasurer said to me 'we've got 785,000 pounds.' My heart sank. That is an amazing amount of money, but that is not enough to say to the builders you can start. So I went home a little bit gloomy. About nine o'clock on Good Friday evening, I had a phone call from the treasurer. He said Adrian, you need to sit down. He said the total has gone up to 970,000 pounds. I was blown away. I had no idea how in less than eight hours that amount of money had come in. He then found me again on Saturday morning. You won't believe it now at £1,008,000. And then by Sunday morning arrives. He said Adrian it's now £1,016,000. Can I tell you the level of spiritual growth and faith in that church family became sky high?

For years afterwards, whenever anyone says 'Oh, but this will never work', people would always go 'Do you remember the building' It became a symbol of God's faithfulness to us. Nothing is impossible with God. That is where discipleship begins. Do you believe that? I have no idea what lies ahead for you. You're embarking on a big project. What I do know is if Jesus is with you, nothing is impossible. So keep praying. Keep caring, keep trusting. Amen.