

The miracle story that you have just heard, the feeding of the five thousand, is the only miracle story which is told in each of the four gospels. This rather suggests to me that there is plenty in this story that the Holy Spirit really wants us to hear, understand, and learn from. So let's start by imagining what it must have been like to have been there – with the benefit of being able to pick parts of the story from the four separate tellings of it in the bible.

Imagine if you will that you are one of those people in that huge crowd, a crowd which we are told is made-up of 5000 men as well as women and children so could easily have been 10/15/20 thousand people. I'm going to put myself in that crowd this morning.

What am I doing here? Well, the answer is actually quite simple. You see everyone has heard of this man called Jesus from Nazareth. And what is more word got around that he was at a place called Bethsaida and so my friends and I joined the crowd as we went to try and find him, to see him, and as we had heard some interesting stories about what he does, to see what he might do next.

When we arrived at Bethsaida, I got talking to a man there - he seemed to know a lot about Jesus and what had just happened to him. Apparently the man who we all knew as John the Baptist, who I rather think was a big friend of Jesus, had just been killed by Herod. Herod was a horrible man. He liked to think he was strong but he was just concerned that everybody knew he was in charge, and the story goes that his new wife's daughter had tricked him into having John the Baptist's head cut off.

I mean being tricked by a teenage girl to do something like that; that's hardly the action of a strong leader is it? But however it happened, Jesus' friend John the Baptist was dead, so Jesus must have been really sad and when I heard that I felt a bit guilty about being there as I rather thought what Jesus really wanted was just a bit of peace and quiet.

The other thing this man told me though is that he and some of the other people who he said were the disciples, had been sent out by Jesus to teach people all about God and they had all just got back - and Jesus said to them let's all go to Bethsaida and you can tell me all about how you got on. And then we all turned up. That wasn't going to make for a relaxing quiet time for Jesus and his disciples was it?

So when this man, the disciple, had finished telling me these things I really expected either him and his fellow disciples or even Jesus to ask us to go away and explain they just needed some peace - but they didn't do that. Instead Jesus started talking to us about how we should live our lives and about God and about love and then he saw some people who were sick and he started to heal them. And the atmosphere in that place with this amazing man who must have been sad, who must have been tired, who wanted to talk to his disciples - this man who was now talking to us, healing those who were not well – that atmosphere – well it was lovely. It was just so peaceful and we just all stood or sat together listening, and sometimes chatting about what Jesus had said, or watching what Jesus was doing.

You know we were a really mixed bunch – there were some people there who were clearly, well, rich, and other, like us, who weren't, but we all got on so well. I think it was just amazing and unlike anything I had experienced before, and the time flew by.

I don't think I mentioned that my wife and children were with me and as the day went on, the children did what children are very good at, they reminded us that they hadn't had anything to eat all day and that they were really hungry. And when they started to say that other families around us realised the same thing. We had been so busy talking and listening to Jesus and watching what he was doing the fact that we were hungry slipped us by. I rather thought it was then time for us to get up and try to find some food somewhere - but then it happened. I don't really know how to describe it. I don't know to this day how it happened but believe you me it happened.

Jesus started talking to these disciple people and they started talking about how they were going to feed us. There were thousands of us, how on earth were they going to feed us all - especially when they had a look around to see what food they got and the only food seemed to be one lad who had five loaves of bread and two fish. But Jesus was determined that they should feed us all and somehow they did. Somehow we all had plenty to eat and do you know what? Afterwards there was just loads left over. And when we did go home it was with the memory of what Jesus told us, of how Jesus had healed sick people, how Jesus had somehow fed us all, and we knew we had been in the presence of something no someone unbelievably special.

There are many miracle stories in the Bible but of all of them the one that I would have liked to have been at, the one I would have liked to witness, is this one. Not because I wanted to see how the miracle was done, but because it shows me who Jesus was and what was so important to him. He simply loved people. He could not do enough for ordinary people. He never took the easy way out. He never rejected anyone. He simply loved everyone – even those people who made life difficult for him, those who stopped him doing what he planned to do, those who meant he had to carry on working when he was exhausted. And in this one story we see all of that. Jesus' disciples wanted to send the people away to find their own food but Jesus was having none of that – which in itself tells us two things.

First, how amazingly loving Jesus is, but Second, how hard it can be sometimes be to be one of Jesus' disciples as he can ask us to do difficult things. I'm sure some of you have been faced with unexpected guests and your immediate thought may well have been, "have I got enough food in to offer them dinner?" Well imagine that situation but at least a thousand times worse, and I am guessing that is how the disciples were feeling at that point.

But should they have been feeling like that? These 12 men had already spent quite a time with Jesus and had witnessed Jesus doing all sorts of amazing things – turning water into wine at a wedding feast for a start. And the teaching they had heard, the healings they had seen, surely for Jesus to perform another miracle, however impossible it felt at that moment, well if Jesus wasn't worried, why should they be?

And this is the same Jesus that we are here today to worship, to sing love songs to, to commit ourselves to as Amelia has done today, to pray to, and, we ourselves will share a meal with Jesus at the communion table later.

This is the same Jesus who came to this earth to show us the love that his father God has for each and every one of us, but how often do we forget that? When we go through tricky times in our lives, how often do we just try and sort them out for ourselves, and don't think about asking God for help? How often do we assume, "I don't need to bother God with this – he doesn't need to know this, I'll be fine by myself." Or sometimes we go a stage further, "Well God might help that person, but not me. I'm not good enough, I'm not close to God – whoever God is? No, there's no help for me there."

Well, if you are tempted to think that way remember the story of the feeding of the five thousand. Jesus, the son of God, and so was both a human being and was God, wanted to, and did, feed everyone that day. There were no tests, no entry requirements, no conditions, he just wanted to feed everyone, to show, I believe, that he loves everyone without any conditions. He did on that day. He does on this day.

That is the Jesus who I love.

Amen