

Stokesley Methodist Church



Sunday 6th August, 2017

Welcome to Worship

10.30am Morning Worship led by Rev Andrew Robinson
including the Sacrament of Holy Communion
6.00pm Town Close with Revd Lisa Quarmby

A Gathering Prayer from the Roots Resources

Come to the living waters, you that have a thirst and cannot quench it, and you that hunger for more from life.

Come, you that labour but find no rest, and you that spend but are not satisfied.

Listen out for God, and you will find sustenance for your soul and a purpose for your life.

O God, you call us into the covenant you made of old, to be your people, faithful and true; to witness to the good news of Jesus Christ.

Let us come to you now, that we might know of your love, that we might experience your mercy, and share your peace with one another.

Amen.

Lectionary Readings:

Isaiah 55 v1-5 Invitation to the Thirsty

"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!"

Psalm 145 V8-9, 14-21 A Psalm of Praise

"The Lord upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down."

Romans 9 v1-5 God's Sovereign Choice

"Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises."

Matthew 14 v13-21 Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand

"They all ate and were satisfied ..."

A Taste of the Kingdom

In this week's reading from Matthew we hear how, at the end of the day, the crowd that followed Jesus round the lake needs feeding. Jesus meets their need through a miraculous proliferation of bread and fish. This miracle is an image of life together in the kingdom of heaven – it gives us a foretaste of the heavenly banquet. It teaches us that only a little is often enough.

Do you believe in miracles?

A miracle is an amazing event for which we have no logical explanation. It is beyond our understanding. We have learned much about our natural world, but there are many things we don't completely understand.

Have you ever seen or experienced a miracle? Salmon are hatched and swim down streams and rivers into the ocean. After swimming thousands of miles in the vast ocean they return to the exact river and stream where they were hatched. We don't understand exactly how salmon are able to do this.

The same can be said of migrating birds. We don't know exactly why, at a certain time, they decide to move to another location and are able to navigate back to a place they had been the previous season.

We know that when conditions are right – a suitable amount of sunshine and water, a seed begins to grow.

These are amazing events in nature we don't completely understand - they are miracles.

When Jesus heard the news of the death of John the Baptist at the hands of Herod Antipas and Herodias he withdrew to the desert. The passage that follows describes a nature miracle – the feeding of the crowd – preceded by a very brief reference to a number of healings. Yet the emphasis is not on miracles as such, about which many people today have doubts and questions, but on a large group of people – 5,000 of them – who are so drawn to Jesus that they follow him round the lakeside, defying heat and hunger, staying until they have little chance of returning home before dark (a dangerous time). Such trust! When the disciples draw Jesus' attention to the crowd's need for food – of which he must surely have been aware – he says, 'they do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.' (v16). If you have enough faith, you can even move a mountain, or feed 5,000 people. In the event Jesus feeds them himself, though there is no detail given about how he might have done it. But the point is that Jesus meets the basic needs of this trusting crowd of simple people. It is a theme that we also find in today's psalm:

'The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time.' (Psalm 145 v15)

However the feeding was accomplished, here is an image of a little (five small loaves and two fish) going a very long way – and with leftovers. It reminds us of last week's morsel of yeast working its way through enough flour to feed a village as an image of the growth of God's kingdom. Or of a few good seed multiplying one-hundredfold. Although the feeding is technically a miracle story, it is the stuff of the kingdom.

So, the image of everyone being fed on rich food, in the context of our readings, becomes an image of eating with the Messiah (Christ) in God's kingdom – the so-called Messianic Banquet. This means that, in the light of Isaiah 55 and Psalm 145, Jesus' feeding of that crowd of Galileans can be taken as an anticipation of eating that same meal together with each other, with all nations, with God and his Messiah. Even though no wine was drunk by the sea, the feeding of the crowd is an anticipation of the Christian Eucharist that is in turn an anticipation of eating in God's kingdom.

The Old Testament reading, the psalm and the Gospel reading are linked by 'eating'. In the passage from the Book of Isaiah, the prophet anticipates the end of the exile and a return to a renewed Israel, with a rebuilt city and temple. It is an idealised picture in which everyone will be fed, no matter how poor. Yet the passage says more than this. First, do not spend your money or waste your labour on unsatisfying pursuits. 'Listen,' the prophet says; just as the hearers of Jesus' parables are called to listen. God will make an everlasting covenant with David and his descendants. These kings will be witnesses to this covenant and leaders of peoples, who will call nations to run to them. This is a covenant that was eventually fulfilled in Jesus – and here he is, surrounded by a hungry crowd of trusting Galileans and about to initiate a miracle.

Sometimes we don't understand how things happen or why.

But as you go about your day, think about the possibilities of miracles.

You might be surprised by what you discover.

A Sending Out Prayer

Loving God, give us this day our daily bread,
sufficient for the day and with some to spare.

Send us out to share what we have with others.

Amen.