

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost 24th July 2005

Rob Lamerton

Readings:

- Genesis 32: 22-31
- Psalm 17: 1-7 & 16 - page 235
- Romans 9: 1-8
- Matthew 14: 13-21

Yesterday we had the funeral of Ed Austrums here at St Philip's. Ed and Sue his partner are friends of the Forbes' — Colin and Pat.

Ed did not go to church — If he did, he would have gone to St Waywards in the City!

But Colin and Pat's ministry to Sue and to Ed in his dying days was a wonderful gift of Christian Service and through them we were able to have a meaningful celebration of Ed's life **AND** I think, in some small way we brought the gift of Christ to Sue and to the people who gathered.

I mention that because it seems to me an illustration of the gospel story — the disciples of Jesus discern a need and are able to give of themselves; of their meagre resources with the Lord's help — to meet a need!

Recall the story — Jesus escaped to a quiet place by himself when he heard the news of the death of John the Baptist.

John was not only the one who paved the way for Jesus — he was also his cousin!

but the crowds heard about Jesus being there in Galilee. We are told that Jesus "had compassion" on them and cured people!

At evening the disciples recognize the need for the people to eat but they encourage Jesus to send the people away so that they could go and buy food in the villages.

Jesus however, tells them that there is no need for the crowd to go — you give them something to eat!

The disciples are aware of how little they have
"We have nothing but five loaves and two fish."

"Bring them to me" says Jesus who blesses (prays) breaks and shares by giving the food back to the disciples who distribute it and we hear all ate and were filled!

A few points about the story.

It appears six times in various ways in the gospels indicating that it popped up regularly in the early church's discussion and shared memory of Jesus before it was recorded by Mark, Luke and John.

The setting for the story is in the countryside in GALILEE, NOT in the religious heartland around Jerusalem but well away in a place where people were thought to be ill educated and irreligious! It is a sort of Communion in the Countryside. Christ feeding the masses.

The disciples (the small Christian community) are the agents of Christ's blessings to the crowd. **They discern the need** but are unwilling or unable to believe they can help, so suggest the people are sent away.

But Jesus challenges them "they need not go away... **YOU** GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO EAT!" (*WHO? ME?*)

The disciples indicate that they do not have much — their resources are very little — five loaves and two fish
But something happens — they take what little they have to Jesus.

They are willing to hand over their food.

This is an act of faith/of generosity which enables Jesus to minister to the crowd.

There are times when we are called upon to let go of even the little we have in the service of Christ and of the world around us that we might be the Lord's agents so that people's spirits are nourished and lives are touched.

Some will see this as a simple miracle of feeding.

But there are other ways: Possibly the people only received a morsel of food, but somehow they were fed in ways we do not understand by the generosity of the disciples and the

love of Christ.

William Barclay suggests that the willingness of the disciples to give what they had triggered a generosity, a willingness to share that had not been there before. He points out that the crowds would have hardly left home without food and that they were moved to share their resources as well!

In that sense the miracle is even greater — because it involves the changing of human attitudes // the softening of human hearts!

Jesus continues to say to his people "You give them something to eat!" in situations where people are in difficulty — You do something!

In the situations such as in Niger "You give them something to eat" and in those situations closer to home: You as my disciples, bring help and healing!

I encountered recently a family where two sisters were at odds with how unwilling they were to make amends but God calls us (like Jacob) to be the agents for blessing the world. The story of Jacob wrestling with God the night before he was to meet his estranged brother Esau... He too was confronted by God [with] the need to do something for the relationship.

In this Eucharist, week by week, we celebrate the fact that our meagre resources are brought to Christ and we are enabled time and time again to be nourished and strengthened.