

St Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor
Ninth Sunday after Pentecost — 25 July 2021

Revd Martin Johnson

2 Kings 4:42-44; John 6:1-21

Bread sanctified

The Olympics are upon us, but whilst the world looks to Tokyo, we been thinking about Brisbane 2032. It seems an awfully long way off, but it will come soon enough. When I watched our political leaders and others celebrating and heard about the enormous economic windfall that would benefit us all, I felt the cynic in me coming to the fore. I was reminded of the Roman poet Juvenal who wrote of 'bread and circuses.' He was making reference to the Roman practice of providing free wheat to Roman citizens as well as costly [circus games](#) and other forms of entertainment as a means of gaining [political power](#). I put such thoughts away, as best I could, and turned to the readings set down for the day.

Perhaps I should say that I am not a complete grump! I do understand that events such as the Olympic Games draw folk together and provide the impetus for us to strive for the best. I also understand that in today's world of pandemic we are looking for something glamorous to take our minds off the infection tally that dominates our news. But in this morning's reading from John's gospel we experience the opposite. There is nothing glamorous about this event. If what Christ offers in John's account is a miracle it is a very unglamorous one. He takes bread and fish, gives thanks, breaks them and shares. Out of simple actions all are fed as much as they need. There are no pyrotechnics, no political or economic manifestos, no electioneering. It prefigures and mirrors the four-fold shape of the Eucharist and inevitably draws our attention to it. Staggering though it seems that so many could be feed with so little – especially when we are told that twelve baskets of fragments were gathered up after the meal – Jesus' action are grounded in the politics of *service*, bringing to folk the very basic necessity of life. Many of those present when they realised what had happened saw economic and political opportunities. They wanted to make Jesus King, and later on they try to find Jesus and he chastises them – you're only looking for me because of the bread, aren't you?

Yes, this story is all about bread, but on the other hand it isn't. The bread is simply a sign, it is a potent one yes, but it is just a sign. Bread is a staple, in our culture as in the time of Jesus. We have other options today but the masses at the time of Jesus did not. What Jesus does in distributing bread is deeply of 'this world.' And yet it isn't, the bread of this world is about politics and economics. Our Philip gets tangled up in that, 'how are going to afford all this?' What Jesus is showing us is that the resources needed for everyone to have enough are there for us, should we prepared to offer them up. Now this is much more than just the old chestnut – 'this miracle is all about sharing.' It is about offering, this is what the strange character from Baal-shalishah is doing, bringing food from the first fruits to the man of God. He is offering, offering what he has to God and when we do that it becomes something more, although perhaps we should say it becomes what it truly is. You see Jesus doesn't make clear distinctions between what is of this world and what is other worldly. He comes to break down that distinction which is an artificial one. *He is* the reconciliation between this world and the next – the Kingdom. Bread is the staple in is life, but it in Jesus' hands it is more. What Jesus does in distributing bread is both of this world and it is other worldly.

One way of understanding this is looking at our modern use of food. I wonder if like me you struggle to eat the portions that often arrive any many pubs and restaurants. They are often huge; Susan and I regularly share a portion because otherwise food is wasted – food that we have offered by saying Grace. If we understand all food as in some way sacred then we would

not waste it. Jesus tells his disciples to ensure that all the scraps are collected, nothing is wasted, it is sacred.

What we are striving for is to live sacramentally. To see each other, our world, the environment, the food that sustains us as sacred – not through the lens of the politics or economics. The Eucharist is but a glimpse of this, a reminder of what our calling truly is. Living Eucharistically is our calling, it involves thankfully offering ourselves to God, everything we do and say is, as we say right there at the altar, offered to God; ‘accept and use our offerings in the service of your kingdom.’ If we are prepared to do that, then there will always be enough and indeed there will be more.

The Benedictine Gregory Dix, wrote a tome called ‘The Shape of the Liturgy’, in it he describes that fourfold action at the Eucharist, take, bless, break (offer) and give, but he also writes rather colourfully about ‘Homo Eucharisticus.’ This is what we are called to be. If we are truly grateful for what we have received a number of things flow from that. We will want to treat what we have received with care, not wastefully, we will want to ensure there is enough and we will want to offer it back to God.

We have all heard that the Eucharist is about politics and economics. I have said it from the pulpit. There is truth in this, because bread is all about politics and economics. But if we remain simply at that point, we will be among those seeking to make Jesus King, a political leader, a role he rejected, or we will be looking to get more bread from him, an economic guru! If our Eucharist is simply about bread then we have missed the point. It is about the sanctification of bread, about the making of something that feeds our souls as well as our stomachs. And when we grasp that we will begin to glimpse the nature of the miracle, the nature of sacrament which is to take the ordinary and offer it to God that it might be sacred, something that nourishes and brings life in its fullest.

John concludes the feeding account with another of the stories of Jesus on the lake. This is significant because clearly those who have been fed and the disciples have not understood the miracle because they do not know who it is that has come among them. As Jesus climbs into the boat he says, ‘I am; do not be afraid.’ ‘I am,’ words pregnant with meaning, and which we will hear again next week as Jesus tells us ‘I am the Bread of Life.’ Amen.