

Thought for Sunday 2nd August

An infant teacher was observing her classroom of children while they were drawing. She would occasionally walk around to see each child's work. As she got to one little girl who was working diligently, she asked what the drawing was. The girl said, "I'm drawing God." The teacher paused and said, "But no one knows what God looks like." Without missing a beat, or looking up from her drawing, the girl replied, "They will in a minute."

What does God look like? A recent survey in the UK showed that whilst a majority of people believe in God, we are much less clear on what he's like. For some, God is just unknowable; for others, God is in all and all in him. For still others, God is some stern judge or Santa Claus figure. Even amongst Christians, surveys show people tend to think of God as white, male, old and with a beard.

And yet we can know what God is like. We can, by exploring how Jesus behaves in events such as the one in Matthew 14:13-21 (the feeding of the 5,000 plus), understand God's values, and His intentions towards us and all humanity. So when we come to these events, our question has to be "what is Jesus telling us, revealing to us about God?"



1. He shows us that God cares about the hungry

Here are upwards of 15,000 people in total, and they have nothing to eat. They are in what at that time was a barren, uninhabited place, with no means of getting food. And Jesus cares.

I wonder what sort of miracle you'd do if you were Jesus and wanted to get people to follow you. Maybe a thunderbolt, or blast someone, or fly overhead, or something like that. But in fact, virtually every miracle Jesus does is a direct assault on decay, death and suffering. He is temporarily restoring this world to the way God intends it to be, and as he does that, he's constantly reminding us that God made the world without suffering, without death, without decay. And one day God intends to restore that originally created order in the universe; to wipe away tears and eliminate hunger. But in the meantime, God cares about the hunger, about the pain, about the suffering.

2. He shows us that God wants to take what we offer and work miracles

John tells us in his write up of these events that there was a boy who came with his packed lunch, and Andrew told Jesus, "there is a boy here with five barley loaves and two small fish". At that time, barley was the cheapest type of grain, used to make bread only by the poorest of the poor. So how does Jesus react? "*Pah! I don't need those!*" - or maybe "*how does this boy think what he has will help me to feed 15,000 people?*"

Here in Matthew 14 we read what Jesus does. He takes the barley loaves and the fish, prays, and then gives out, from these five loaves and two fish, enough to feed around 15,000 people, with 12 baskets of food left over.

In taking and using what this small boy offers, Jesus is revealing how important it is to God that we are involved in what He's doing. He wants us to bring what we have to Him, and so to join in with making God's kingdom come on earth.

3. He tells us that God has a greater gift to give.

John tells us what happens next. Matthew is writing for a Jewish audience, and they understand immediately that to provide bread in the wilderness is one of the signs of the Messiah, the one who was to come and rescue humanity. But in the Jewish thought of the day, that meant leading a nation to war against Rome; throwing off the oppressors. John spells it out; the people come to Jesus, and they want to make him king. And for those who weren't there the previous day, they ask Jesus to do it again. Provide bread for the multitude. Show us what you can do.

But in John 6 we hear Jesus saying, *"you're asking for bread; it's me. The bread of heaven, the bread of life, is me."* They are asking for a miracle, but Jesus **is** the miracle. And what Jesus says is so radical, many of the crowd and even his followers leave him. It's too much. Why? What's Jesus saying? Two things.

- Jesus is saying firstly that everyone has a deep, spiritual hunger. And whatever we try to put in there - work, family, wealth, position, fame - is never going to fully satisfy. The singer Madonna gave an interview in 2019 when she explained it like this; *"You walk around with a big hole inside of you, a feeling of emptiness and longing. And I think a lot of times that's why you become an overachiever."*
- Jesus says "I am the bread of life". He's not saying *"I know how to get the bread of life"*, or *"I can produce the bread of life"*. He's saying *"I **am** the bread of life"*. Without me, Jesus says, you will starve eternally. You will never be satisfied with what you put in your life to fill that emptiness. And in using this metaphor of bread, Jesus is also saying he will be broken. He is going to be beaten and whipped and nailed to a cross, so we don't have to bear the death we deserve. His brokenness becomes our life.

Jesus has done everything for us; he was broken to give us the life for which God intended us. He has shown us what's important to God, and how much God hates suffering.

And what Jesus says to us is "come to me". Don't leave like the crowd and the disciples did if it all seems too difficult. Come. Stay. Bring what you have, who you are, and see what miracles God will do. When you feel overwhelmed, when you feel poor and inadequate and your barley loaves just can't do it, come. When you realise you are powerless to overcome your problems, spend time with Jesus. He wants you to come. God wants you to be part of bringing in His new creation, His new life.

Just come.

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