

Matthew 14: 13-21. Feeding of the Five Thousand.

There would be days when Jesus wondered where his next meal was coming from: something that very few of us will ever have experienced. Most of those who came to listen to him were poor people; and on this particular day they were certainly wondering where their next meal was coming from. So were the disciples of Jesus. St Matthew tells us that they were worried enough about that to ask Jesus to do something. And the story goes that a great crowd of hungry people had enough to eat.

The plain meaning of the story is that God cares about hunger and starvation and about people who do not know where their next meal is coming from. The people of South Sudan and Yemen and the favelas of Brazil. That is why Christian Aid matters. That is why it matters that Christian Aid's income increased by 8% this year over last year; and Morningside Parish church played a part in that. In the last twelve months over £100 million spent on emergency relief and the fighting of hunger. There is a grace before meals that Christian Aid encourages us to use: *To those who have hunger give bread; and to those who have bread, give the hunger for justice.*

The story of the feeding of the five thousand has never been only a story about hungry people being fed with real bread. From the earliest days Christians have heard it as a story about people hungry in a different way being fed. As well as physical hunger it is a story about spiritual hunger. Jesus spoke a good deal about a harvest of spiritual good. Last week we were hearing the story of a little seed which grows up into a huge flourishing blossoming plant: a harvest of spiritual growth. The kingdom of God, he said, is like a tiny seed planted inside you growing into something alive and vigorous and beautiful.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled. That is a promise repeated at the communion service. At the

centre of the church's worship is bread. In the communion service Jesus feeds with bread, heavenly bread, the bread of life. There is an inner hunger which needs to be fed.

So where are we to find the food to nourish the poor and empty things that are our inner lives? Will you come with me to the Edinburgh Festival? Let's pretend that I have spare tickets and I'm inviting you to be my companion. Will you come?

Maybe you fancy something funny this year? I always giggle at the BBC radio show "Dead Ringers"; and I see the star is doing a one-woman show on the Fringe. I've no idea what the show will be like, but I will be surprised if it is not funny. There will be some – maybe plenty of – comedy shows at which you and I would be embarrassed to see each other. But there will certainly be some – plenty of – shows that will make everyone laugh. What does that have to do with art? What does comedy have to do with God? Could we speak of a hilarious performance as feeding some part of you that is undernourished? Does God approve of laughter?

G. K. Chesterton once wrote *Angels can fly because they take themselves lightly. Solemnity flows out of people naturally, but laughter is a leap.* I wish more of us made that leap. We don't laugh enough; and particularly we think that Sundays are not for laughter and that God looks down his nose at laughter. Are there not inside you crabbit places, sour places, dried-up places where no humour ever visits? I mean places that are undernourished and are in need of being fed. This Edinburgh Festival might be the source of real feeding; and who knows? – that might be real feeding at the hands of God.

Maybe it stretches your imagination too much to think of God feeding your inner hunger with laughter. Let's try something different. There will be innumerable opportunities to hear stories in Edinburgh over the next few weeks; and I am confident that God uses stories to feed places within the souls of people that are hungry. So you and I will go to the Book Festival. Mary Contini, the Grande Dame of the Italian community in this city - I

suppose I mean the Gran Signora - has a spot about her book: the third in her series exploring her Scottish-Italian family who brought Italian cookery to Scotland.

I've read the first two and I was enthralled. The intertwining of the three pillars on which her family is built: food, family and Catholic faith, is both entertaining and amusing. But the stories are more than that: somehow a story can help you see Scotland, our own community, differently; and indeed to see the world differently.

That should be no surprise to Christians. For God has been using stories to show us the world differently and to show us ourselves differently for a very long time. The Bible itself is a collection of stories which God uses to feed our hunger of meaning and our hunger of belonging and being loved. A people are called out of slavery in Egypt into freedom and faithfulness. When slaves in America heard that story they heard a story about themselves and they sang

*Go down, Moses
Way down in Egypt's land
Tell old Pharaoh
Let my people go*

Jesus told a story about a traveller on a dangerous road, beaten up and left for dead. A Samaritan is kind to him, bathes his wounds and takes him to a place of safety. Suddenly we all become part of the story when it ends – not with Jesus saying “The Samaritan was a nice man” but with Jesus bringing us all into the story by saying “You go and do the same”. The gospels tell a story of A carpenter from Nazareth goes about doing good until he is given over in to the hands of his enemies and is killed and then – then – the stories are about his friends knowing him not to be dead but to be dead no more. It is by stories that God invites us into the deepest places of our souls and there to meet him and share his love. Never underestimate the power of a story. Never underestimate what God will do with stories.

My third ticket for you is to feed your emotions. At our best Scottish people have been hard workers. At our best we have been intellectual achievers. But we have never worn our hearts on our sleeves. Emotionally conservative

might describe many of us. Yet were we not made to sing and to love and to wipe away tears of emotion. Would you say that your own heart has been starved all those years when you have been feeding your body and feeding your mind. So let's go and listen to some music. This time it is not going to be another Abba singalong. Let God feed your hungry heart.

Of course I can recommend the lunchtime concerts here in this church. We all know that Morley Whitehead is an exceptional musician: and this Wednesday will be an opportunity to luxuriate in 45 minutes of his playing, rather than the few minutes we have each Sunday. But in particular the Edinburgh Festival means the Usher Hall. Tomorrow night there is a feast: the richness of the feeding will nourish your emotions so much that you will feel you will never be emotionally starved again. It's Wagner. It's Die Walkure. Even the publicity notes make you lick your lips: *An all-powerful ring in the clutches of a jealous dragon. A forbidden love in defiance of the king of the gods. A warrior princess enchanted within a wall of magic fire. Die Walküre tells a profoundly human story of mankind's emotions, frailties and dramas, evoked in some of Wagner's most powerful, memorable music, including the mighty 'Ride of the Valkyries'.* Add drums and trumpets. Add Bryn Terfel. Add Andrew Davies. What a feast!

We were not made to be cold, brittle, hard and unyielding. God did not give us hearts of stone. God wants to feed us nourish us. Deep down. Making us deeper than we are.

Do you remember that last week we sat in on a preaching class last week. A few years ago a famous American preacher was asked to teach a preaching class for one whole term at a great university. He had to provide a reading list for the students of preaching for the term. He did. It contained only one title. "King Lear".

The Spirit of God will be alive and active and busy in Edinburgh in these next three weeks. It may not be that the best place to meet God will always be inside the churches.