



Seventeenth Sunday Ordinary Time 2006.

2 Kings 4: 42-44 Ephesians 4:1-6 John 6:1-15

I don't know why, but instead of moving onto Mark's account of the multiplication of the loaves, we are given the account from John.

In the second book of the Kings we read of the prophet Elisha and a multiplication of loaves. Elisha's name echoes Jesus' name. They both mean; God saves.

There was a famine and a community of prophets was trying to make do with vegetable stew. Unfortunately someone put in a poisonous plant by mistake. The community was saved by Elisha's intervention. His good turn was reciprocated by a gift of twenty barley loaves brought by a man from a neighbouring town. Elisha asked the donor to set the bread before the community. The man objected on the grounds that the supplies were too meagre to put before a hundred men.

Elisha encouraged him to go ahead, saying that God would provide in abundance. All ate and there were leftovers. This story and others from the life of Elisha showed the people the truth of his name.

The feeding of the five thousand in the Gospels is a similar story. It is about the gratuitous nature of God's love. John's story, like Mark's, begins with a journey across water. As all details are significant we are invited to consider what this symbol means.

Water marks the division between the old life and the new life in Christ. John emphasises this by placing the story in the context of the Passover. A crowd of people seek Jesus because they have heard of or have experienced healing.

Jesus notices the problem that is looming in terms of the need to offer hospitality.

His question is, "Where will we buy food?"

Philip responds with a practical answer. Never mind the where- where is of no use without the cash.

Andrew points out a little boy, the word can also be used of servant, who has more than enough for himself. Andrew has no illusions about the usefulness of the supplies.

Jesus takes over the direction of the action. "Get the people to recline," there was plenty of room. Reclining is the proper posture for a banquet. Mark's touch of describing the people as looking like garden plots is missing from this account.

Jesus began with a blessing. He probably used a typical blessing from his tradition. 'Blessed are you, O Lord, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.'

After the meal, Jesus instructs the disciples to gather up the left overs, there is to be no waste.

This story offers a basis for John's reflection on the Bread of Life. Jesus who feeds is also the food.

At the heart of Jesus' mission is the love he has for all people. As a devout Jew he sat in the synagogue listening to the Word of God, a Word which challenged him to move towards the realisation of the vision of God, expressed through loving kindness, mercy, tenderness and compassion; a Word which challenged him to live enduring faithful love. In responding to this call he will be consumed and poured out as a gift which will bring nourishment to the world.

The task of the Christian community is to pick up the mantle of Jesus and through our sharing of the Word and Sacrament become the food and drink for our hungering communities.

Ephesians reminds us that there is only one body broken and shared. We form that body with Jesus, animated by the Holy Spirit.

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