

NAURC worship from Ipswich Rd URC

Sunday 25th July 2021

Including Holy Communion

Led by Revd John Potter

Welcome and lighting of the peace candle

The call to worship: Psalm 145: 3-4 (Contemporary English version)

³ You are wonderful, Lord,
and you deserve all praise,
because you are much greater
than anyone can understand.

⁴ Each generation will announce
to the next
your wonderful
and powerful deeds.

Prayer of approach and confession

Lord of all life, beginning and end,
provider of food and drink, clothing and warmth,
love and hope, life in all its fullness.
we praise You.

You are the one who sustains us.
the one who nourishes and strengthens us
throughout our daily lives.
we praise You.

When the journey is long and we hunger and thirst,
Bread of Life, You sustain us.

When the road is hard and our bodies weak
Bread of Life, You heal us.

When our spirits are low and we can't carry on
Bread of Life, You revive us.

When we offer our hand in love and in service,
Bread of life, You bless us.

When the challenge is great and the workers are few,
Bread of Life, You empower us.

When the victory is won and we see Your face,
Bread of Life, You will rejoice with us.
We praise You.

Mighty God,
You heap Your love upon us like a parent providing
for their family's needs.
Forgive us when, like spoilt children,
we treat Your generosity as our right
or hug it possessively.
Forgive us that we have kept what we have to ourselves
rather than offering it up to You
that You might feed and sustain others.
Forgive us that we have failed
to be concerned about the waste that our society produces.
Forgive us when have wanted more for ourselves
at the cost of another.
We are sorry, Lord, and in need of Your renewing grace.
As we gather now to worship You,
fill us with anticipation of Your word to us.
Strengthen us for service,
feed and renew us that we might share
in Your purpose in giving life to the world.
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Hymn: Blessed by your name (MP 1036, WLV)

Bible reading: John 6: 1-14 (Good News version)

6 After this, Jesus went across Lake Galilee (or, Lake Tiberias, as it is also called). **2** A large crowd followed him, because they had seen his miracles of healing the sick. **3** Jesus went up a hill and sat down with his disciples. **4** The time for the Passover Festival was near. **5** Jesus looked around and saw that a large crowd was coming to him, so he asked Philip, "Where can we buy enough food to feed all these people?" (**6** He said this to test Philip; actually he already knew what he would do.)

7 Philip answered, "For everyone to have even a little, it would take more than two hundred silver coins to buy enough bread."

8 Another one of his disciples, Andrew, who was Simon Peter's brother, said, **9** "There is a boy here who has five loaves of barley bread and two fish. But they will certainly not be enough for all these people."

10 "Make the people sit down," Jesus told them. (There was a lot of grass there.) So all the people sat down; there were about five thousand men. **11** Jesus took the bread, gave thanks to God, and distributed it to the people who were sitting there. He did the same with the fish, and they all had as much as they wanted. **12** When they were all full, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces left over; let us not waste a bit." **13** So they gathered them all and filled twelve baskets with the pieces left over from the five barley loaves which the people had eaten.

¹⁴ Seeing this miracle that Jesus had performed, the people there said, “Surely this is the Prophet who was to come into the world!”

Sermon: Barley loaves:John 6: 1-15

- > Have you tried the ‘spot the difference’ picture comparison games? I have always enjoyed them far more than word or number puzzles, but that’s just me.
- > The Gospel reading for today encourages a similar kind of comparison as the story of the ‘feeding of the 5,000’ appears in all four Gospels. In fact, it’s the only miracle that Jesus performs which appears in all of them.
- > Matthew, Mark and Luke, which together are called the Synoptic Gospels, frequently have marked similarities. The debate about where their original source information came from is complex and unresolved. John, however, is considerably different.
- > Thus, John’s version of this miraculous meal contains some details that the others don’t and it’s these that I’d like to look at today.

- > The most significant detail is the first one, because John tells us about the timing of when it happened – just before the major Jewish festival of *Passover*.
- > *Passover* as you may recall, but I’ll remind you just in case, was the festival that celebrated the release of the Israelite from slavery in Egypt. It’s called *Passover* because the angel of death passed over the Israelite homes during the final plague in which the firstborn of all people and animals were killed.
- > John set up the record of the events framed by the story of God rescuing the people, of them being saved. It sets all that happens within this mindset of God’s saving actions and provision and maybe points forward to Jesus ultimate act of salvation?
- > Another point to make note of is that *Passover* is also the time of the barley harvest in the Middle East. In her commentary in this passage, Margaret Barker even states that *Passover* took over the existing barley harvest festival.

- > The timing of this great shared meal is reinforced by another detail that John adds.
- > He tells his readers that the loaves which the disciples gather are barley loaves. Apparently, this was the sort of bread that was eaten by poor people – is this Jesus changing focus away from the traditional celebrations centred on the great temple in Jerusalem overseen by the priests in all their finery and now re-setting the meaning of this festival to be among ordinary people on a grassy hill in the countryside?
- > There is another small detail that reinforces this point based on the word used for the fish that the people shared. A commentary on this reads: “while the Synoptics use ‘ichthys’, the well-known Christian acronym for Jesus’ saving significance, John uses opsarion or “dried fish.” Apparently dried fish was more a food for poor people. The whole setting in John reminds us that Jesus and the disciples are sharing with just ordinary people.

- > The next detail that John gives us is where the loaves and fish come from. The synoptics don’t say, but John tells us that it is a boy who turns up with the food.

- > Frustratingly though, even though this boy saves the day, the women and children get left off the headcount – it's only Matthew who remarks that it is 5,000 men besides women and children.
 - > Statistics aside, for me, this shows the importance of children and young people within our faith. It's a shining example of a child leading the way where the adults fail.
 - > Personally, I also think there may be another link to *Passover*. In current day Jewish liturgies, it is a child who is given an important task of asking questions at the meal table, and the responses tell of the meaning of Passover. But this link may well be tenuous as I don't know about liturgies in the times of Jesus.
- > John clearly directs his readers to examine this huge picnic within the framework of *Passover*.
- > With the benefit of hindsight, we can look back at this story and see links to another meal at *Passover* time. The time when Jesus shared His last supper with the disciples. We all know the story of the Last Supper so well that you have probably already spotted the similarities with what John tells us:
“Jesus took the bread, gave thanks to God, and distributed it”.
- > There are such close similarities, that I think Jesus sharing bread in this way, is an aspect of our celebration of Holy Communion.
- > But what Jesus did on the hillside that day changed the perspective of *Passover* and widened it out far further – moving the focus that had been on the temple and the priests, away from grand buildings and outward to be among the ordinary people, away from ritual food to everyday food that everyone ate.
- > In some ways it brings God's presence full circle back to the time after the escape from Egypt when God provided food for all the people wherever they were on their journey. And God's presence went with the people signified by the Ark of the Covenant. Now God's presence was back with the people – now in the person of Jesus.
- > This widening out of God's presence brings me to the second point for us to take away from this text: that of inclusion.
- > This is Jesus out and about in the countryside with the poor – in contrast to God's presence being mediated by priests in a temple.
- > Let's recall the important role of the boy in John's retelling of the story too and remember that in the society structure of those days, children were of no significance at all. But Jesus changes the balance completely – another example of God's upside-down kingdom.
- > It's reassuring that, out on the hillside that day, the only qualification for sharing this meal with Jesus was turning up and wanting to hear His teaching. That's all.
- > I know I keep going on about the idea of 'radical welcome' but here we see it again in the actions of our Saviour recorded in Holy Scripture.
- > As Jesus took bread and shared it – with all those present, may we do the same.
Amen

Prayer of thanksgiving and intercession

God of miracle, provider of daily bread,
word of life and love,
we thank You for the gift of Your Son Jesus, living bread,
broken and shared for all.

We thank You that even the crumbs of our lives
and of our labours are useful to You in the service of Your kingdom.

We thank You
for Your endless overflowing grace that knows no bounds
even as we seek to limit it through our bad choices.

Lord God

As You heard the cries of Your people
in the wilderness and fed them bread from heaven,
as we remember how Jesus nourished Your people
with words of justice and compassion
hear us today as we pray for our world.

We pray for those whose daily need for food, clean water
and proper shelter goes un-met and for those misusing what they have
in the vain pursuit of pleasure.

Feed them with a sense of justice and fairness
that they might stand firm in their right to a decent life for all people now.

We pray for those whose lives have been broken
by violence and crime, conflict and struggle.

Feed them with courage and anticipation
of a life beyond the barriers which hold them back.

We pray for those who are sick or sorrowing
and those who care for and console them.

We pray especially for those we know personally
who are facing difficulties at this time
and who we name in a time of silence...

Fill them, Lord, with Your healing presence
and remind them of Your promises.

We pray for those who have lost faith in themselves and in You
and who struggle to find meaning in life.

focus their eyes on You, Lord, and give them hope for a new day.

We pray for ourselves that we might be filled
with energy to serve You better in our daily living.

And that we might, even in our doubt,
be reminded that You will never turn away or abandon us.

May we always look to You
As the one who gives us life.
All this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Reflection (music and pictures) barley to bread

Holy Communion

Hymn: To God be the glory (MP 708, WLV)

The Blessing

Go now, to be nourished
in the love of God;
to be generous
in the way of Christ Jesus
and to be filled and fuelled
by the living Spirit.
And may the blessing of all three,
Creator, Saviour and Life-Force
be with you and those you love
today and always. Amen