

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

26th July 2009

Year B

Last week we read the sections around the account of the feeding of the multitude and the walking on water in Mark's gospel; but today we read these events in the Gospel of John (John 6.1-21) It's the familiar story of the people without a shepherd, hungry for guidance, for healing, for rescue, for love, as well as for food in an oppressed and poverty-stricken society. And Jesus met their need. His generosity was so great that there was food left over - a sign of his abundant love and provision.

The feeding of the crowd is an enacted parable. The Jewish crowd no doubt understood the many OT references to bread, manna from heaven, and the promise that God would always feed his hungry people. Jesus' actions, as told by John, were interpreted as a sign from God that he would save them.

"Gracious God, you have placed within the hearts of all your children a longing for your word and a hunger for your truth" (Collect for the day). Despite our prosperity, our advancement in economic, social and political ways, many in our world are crying out for guidance, healing, rescue, and love as well as food. It is easy to think of those in need being somewhere else; but needy people are in our homes and in our towns. Some seek freedom from whatever oppresses them and prevents their living full and happy lives; some seek release from disappointments or lost opportunities; some seek pardon from failure and weakness; some seek healing and forgiveness.

The petition in the Collect sums up our faith: 'grant that, believing in [Jesus] we may know him to be the true bread of heaven and the food of eternal life.' This is one of the great mysteries of our faith. We feed on Jesus by receiving his salvation achieved by his atoning death on the cross, by claiming him Lord and acknowledging the power of his Spirit within us, by reading his words of teaching, pardon and encouragement; by receiving the sacrament of his body and blood; by entering into his life so that he may live in us and we may experience the joy of the Kingdom of Heaven. See AHB No 434

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

5th July 2009

Year B

Grace is a free gift of God, enabling us to do things which by ourselves we would be incapable of doing. God desires the salvation of all people; he wants everyone to be in a Father-child relationship with him. We being free, are responsible for our own actions, but we rely on God to help us to do what is right and good. *Amazing grace (56 in AHB)* is one of the most popular hymns today, perhaps because it gives several examples of the expression of God's grace to people who fall short of God's righteousness.

In 2 Cor. 12.2-10 Paul speaks of his own experience of grace. He speaks of his 'thorn in the flesh' which has been variously interpreted as epilepsy, migraine, or other ailments. Whatever plagued him, it was not sufficient to impede his ministry. He had the assurance from God that his grace was sufficient, that power was made perfect in his weakness by God's grace. Such grace had brought him through insults, hardships and calamities. He knew he did not act in his own strength alone.

Jesus taught his disciples to rely on God's grace and trust in his provision for ministry. He sent out the twelve in his name to preach the good news of the kingdom, to call people to repentance and to teach and heal as an extension of his ministry. In that trust they were able to perform wonders. God's grace was sufficient for them.

God calls us to rely on his grace. In our ministering communities God calls each of us to ministry in some way. For some it will be as clergy, or pastoral assistants, or in group leadership, in various tasks in the church and out in the community. Sometimes we feel that we are not good enough, that we don't have the gifts or the skills, that people will reject us or laugh at us, or that we will fail. We need to hear, with Paul, God's gracious words, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness".

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

12th July 2009

Year B

We often hear people speak of 'God's plan for the world'. Well, what is it? Ephesians 1.1-14 is an explanation. The purpose of God 'before the foundation of the world' has been to make it possible for people to become his true children, and to gather them into a family of love. Through Jesus Christ's dying and living, he has overcome all that prevents us from being in this close relationship. Moreover, there is still more to the plan, 'in the fullness of time'. The whole cosmos will be subject to God's saving grace. He tells the Christians in Ephesus that they, who were the first to hope in Christ, have been sealed with the Holy Spirit; are promised inheritance in his kingdom, and thus live to give glory to God.

Now 2000 years later, we share this same relationship with God as the first Christians did. By our Baptism we are adopted as children of the heavenly Father, and are sealed with the Holy Spirit. We share the inheritance of the kingdom. (See Baptism service in APBA).

The 'rights' of baptism are wonderful, but with them come responsibilities. *The prayer for all who are baptized in Christ* (p. 80 APBA) asks God's grace so that the fruit of his Spirit may be produced in us, that we will be equipped to serve God's people and to be bearers of good news to the world, and enabled to live in holiness and righteousness.

We are part of God's plan for the world! We are called we as individuals and as a community of Christians to give glory to God and to work towards the whole earth being gathered into God. "He has made known to us the mystery of his will". We know that the love we have graciously received needs extension into the whole world. How can we love God and not another? The ripple of love needs to extend into our community in loving care to the sick, needy, unhappy and lonely and then to the whole world through our generous response to appeals through our mission agencies or other agencies, prayer support and active service. We are agents of God's love, justice and peace in his plan for redemption of the world.

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

19th July 2009

Year B

We know of numerous walls: the walls of Jericho, the walls of Jerusalem, Hadrian's wall, the Great Wall of China, the Berlin Wall and now of the Israeli separation wall with Palestine. Walls of defence, protection, or occupation but always of division between people. The use of the word metaphorically to mean the deep hostilities between people has been with us for centuries. So the letter to the Ephesians 2.11-22, the core passage of this epistle, is about Christ's breaking down the dividing walls between different people.

The conflict between the Gentiles and the Jews signifies all human hostility. Paul speaks as a Jew to a Gentile audience of their status as 'aliens' and 'strangers' to God's relationship of promise, being without hope in the world. But now, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, all people can be in a situation of grace and salvation. This theological passage marks what Christ has done through his saving acts: He has made both groups into one i.e. there is a new creation; he has broken down the walls of hostility i.e. the law no longer is a cause of separation of clean and unclean; he has made peace with all people for he has reconciled Jews and Gentiles who now have access in one Spirit to the Father.

Paul continues to use a building metaphor. The wall has been broken down and a new household of God has been built: with foundations, cornerstone, and structure, - a holy temple, a dwelling place of God. This reconciled community of the church is itself the temple. By building together, reconciled people can truly become the place in which God dwells. No doubt this was a rich image for Jews in relation to the 'house of God', the Temple, the house for the ark, the dwelling place of God. (2 Sam. 7.1-14)

What an image for the Church to aspire to? What an example we can be to our local communities, our nation, the world! Christians who are members of the household of God cannot hold to social constructions of gender, class, race and nation. In a world of division, we are called to be agents of reconciliation and peace.