

### John 6:1-21

2 Kings 4:42-end; Ephesians 3:14-end

It's often pointed out that there's a real irony in the fact that, whilst so many people in the *majority* world face chronic starvation, we in the *West* have such a plentiful provision of food. *Our* problem actually lies in our tendency to eat too much – as exemplified by the government's campaign to crack down on childhood obesity. It's a contrast which, in a sense, brings into focus the very *practical* significance of the miraculous event which we popularly refer to as the feeding of the five thousand.

Because, from a *practical* point of view, it simply reminds us of the great abundance of God's provision for humanity. God *has* supplied us with more than enough to meet our own needs *and* the needs of all people in our world. Even though the five loaves and the two fish might have seemed grossly inadequate to feed the huge crowd, when the food was distributed by the Lord and shared

among the people, there was more than enough to go round. God *has* made abundant provision, but there's still a huge inequality in its distribution. So, we need to learn how to share.

This lesson is echoed in our Old Testament reading, where we again find a demonstration of God's abundant provision. The prophet Elisha was in Gilgal, at a time when the area was experiencing a famine. He had to provide hospitality for 100 sons of the prophets, even though all that was available were 20 loaves of barley and some fresh ears of grain. Like the disciples, Elisha's servant doubts that such a little food can satisfy the needs of so many men. But Elisha is confident that God will multiply the little food that's available, so that it will be *more* than enough for his guests. And God's word is indeed fulfilled.

And alongside this, the feeding of the five thousand reminds us that the Lord abundantly supplies all our *spiritual* needs. The young boy came and offered to Jesus his five loaves and two fish – the humble

offering of the poor – and Jesus transformed these into such an abundant provision. In the same way, we might think that what *we* have to offer the Lord is rather meagre – ‘What use can *I* be in the Lord’s service?’, ‘Surely I don’t have much to offer?’ But we’re reminded here that Jesus takes what little we have to offer, and multiplies it, so that what *we* thought was insufficient, can be used mightily by God as we seek to serve him and to be effective ambassadors for his Kingdom in our daily lives.

Indeed, as we consider the wider parish which we serve and the town we inhabit, the Lord Jesus asks *us*, as a Christian community here at St Botolph’s, ‘Where are *we* to buy bread for these people to eat?’ It’s easy to feel overwhelmed by the immensity of the task set before us, then to look at our seemingly inadequate resources, and to simply resign ourselves to hopelessness and despair – concluding that we just don’t have enough to meet the great need around us. But, *Jesus* is not discouraged by the little we have to offer. Because when we wholeheartedly surrender what we have to

*him*, he can use us in ways beyond our imagining. He takes what is ordinary and turns it into the *extraordinary*.

So, the first thing today’s Bible readings remind us is that the Lord *supplies* – he abundantly supplies our physical needs and those of the whole world, and as believers, he supplies our every spiritual need, if only we place our trust in *him*.

Then secondly, we’re reminded that the Lord *strengthens* us. The reading from Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians takes the form of a prayer in which the apostle prays for *strength* for the believers in Ephesus. He talks of believers being strengthened with the power of God’s Holy Spirit dwelling *in* us. Yes, God is able to do more than we can ever imagine – he can work well beyond our desires, thoughts and dreams. But this can happen *only* through *his* power at work in and through us. If we try to do things merely through our *own* efforts, then we will get nowhere - we are doomed to fail. We need to be dependent upon the Lord and the

power of his Spirit in everything. After all, what are we doing it all *for*? It's *not* to make ourselves feel good, or merely to keep the Church of England ticking along, but ultimately, as Paul reminds us, it is first and foremost for the glory of God – “to *him* be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus...” So, our prayer must be for strength from the Lord – for the indwelling of Christ, that we may be truly open to being “filled with all the fullness of God”, and that God's powerful love may, as it were, sweep us off our feet.

And thirdly, we're reminded today that the Lord *sustains* us. The other event recorded in our Gospel reading is that of Jesus walking on the lake. Here the disciples are alone in the boat, in the darkness, and a storm blows up – a frequent occurrence on the Sea of Galilee. But the key issue here is that the Lord himself is *not* with them. Without the Lord's presence with them, the disciples are being tossed about by the winds and the waves, struggling to find their way to their intended destination.

It's a bit like that when it comes to our *own* walk of Christian discipleship. When we take our focus off Jesus – when we lose sight of him – it's easy to lose our way, getting tossed around by fears and doubts of different kinds, falling into despair, even being led astray by popular thinking in society which is contrary to God's word.

In the midst of their fears, Jesus comes walking on the waves towards his disciples. At first, they don't recognise him and are terrified. Nonetheless, even though Jesus might have been out of *their* sight, *they* had never been out of *his* sight. The thing is, though *we* might often take *our* eyes off Jesus, *he* will not abandon us – his commitment to us is unconditional. What's more, we're reminded that we can have complete confidence in Jesus because of who he *is*; the English phrase “It is I” is actually ‘εγω ειμι’ in the Greek – literally ‘I, I Am’. It refers directly to the conversation between Moses and God in Exodus 3:13-14, where it says this:

But Moses said to God, ‘If I come to the Israelites and say to them, “The God of your ancestors has sent me to you”, and they

ask me, “What is his name?” what shall I say to them?’ God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ He said further, ‘Thus you shall say to the Israelites, “I AM has sent me to you.” ’

Jesus is Lord of the winds and the waves – he is the personal manifestation of Almighty God.

So, the presence of Christ, fully God and fully man, brings renewed hope and power to us as those seeking to follow him. He still comes to us, in the midst of the ‘ups and downs’ of *our* lives, calming our fears with the words of his greeting, “It is I; do not be afraid”, or literally, ‘stop being afraid!’ – he is with us, guiding us and *sustaining* us through the storm, drawing us back to him, and bringing us safely to our destination.

As we share in Communion this morning, perhaps we come with many burdens upon our hearts, trying to find a way to navigate through the storms of life. In the midst of all this, may we rediscover a dependence upon the Lord’s sustaining power:

*Just as I am, though tossed about / With many a conflict  
many a doubt / Fightings within and fears without / O Lamb  
of God, I come.*

So, our readings from God’s word today remind us powerfully of three ‘S’s – that the Lord *supplies*, the Lord *strengthens*, and the Lord *sustains*. He *supplies* our every need – physical and spiritual – and makes abundant use of what we have to offer in his service. He *strengthens* us by his Holy Spirit to serve him effectively in our daily lives, to his praise and glory. And he *sustains* us through all the trials we inevitably face in life, if only we keep our eyes focused on *him*.

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, as we journey on each day, we pray that we may have a renewed confidence in your abundant provision – physical and spiritual, a renewed desire to share what we have with others, and a renewed desire to offer ourselves in your service, that you might use us to further your purposes here on earth. We ask that we may constantly seek to be filled with your Holy Spirit, *not* attempting to go about things in our *own* strength, but in your mighty power at work within us which is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine. And through all the storms of life, help us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus your Son, that we may have confidence in his sustaining power. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.