

## PENWORTHAM UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

### **Sermon for Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> August 2017**

**Readings:** Isaiah 55:1–5; Matthew 14:13–21

#### **Sermon**

Give thanks to God, share what we have, and trust.

Our gospel reading begins with Jesus grieving. He hears the news that John the Baptist has been murdered by Herod and wants to be by himself. However we understand his relationship with John – as cousins from tradition and Luke’s telling of the Jesus story, or the possibility that Jesus was a disciple of John from scholarship – the relationship was incredibly close.

Jesus hears news of the Baptisers’ death, a death that came as a direct result of challenging the religious and political leadership, and wants to be alone. Jesus is grieving the loss of a friend, a mentor, a teacher and possibly master. He is grieving, but is also painfully aware that he is walking the same path. John the Baptist preached repentance and coming judgement. Jesus preached repentance and coming judgement.

John challenged the Pharisees and came into direct conflict with Herod who ruled over Galilee by denouncing him for divorcing his wife and marrying his brother’s. Jesus challenged the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and was heading towards Jerusalem and probable conflict with the Temple authorities and the Roman governor. John the Baptist has just been killed for challenging the locals and the provincial ruler. Jesus was declaring a similar message and was taking it to the centre of the Jewish faith and the seat of regional Roman power.

Jesus was grieving the loss of a friend, and he was surely fearing that the same fate was awaiting him. In light of this, you can hardly blame him for wanting some time alone. So, the disciples take Jesus by boat to a deserted place but as soon as he steps ashore he is surrounded by a crowd. But despite his grief and fear, his response is to be compassionate.

Jesus then spends the rest of the day wandering through the crowd healing the sick. As dusk descends, Jesus is grieving, fearful, and, by now, also exhausted. The disciples now decide to try to be helpful, and helpful in the least energetic way. It is late in the day; the crowd are hungry – so tell them to go away.

Jesus is grieving, fearful, exhausted, and his response to this easy way out is to challenge the disciples to feed the crowd. Even though he is dead on his feet, Jesus seeks to be even more compassionate.

In Matthew’s telling we don’t have a small boy sharing his lunch – that detail only appears in John.

Here, as in Mark and Luke, we have the disciples coming up with five loaves and two fish. The crowd are ordered to sit, Jesus takes the bread and fish, asks a blessing, breaks them, and passes them to the disciples to share with the crowd.

Everyone, 5000 men, maybe 12000 in all, eat their fill and the leftovers fill twelve baskets. Twelve, the number of disciples, and the number of the tribes of Israel, the twelve sons of Jacob.

Whether or not you believe that the food miraculously multiplied, or that people began to share what they had brought for themselves and had kept back, or it is a symbolic story echoing the stories of Moses where the people of the Exodus from Egypt were fed manna in the wilderness, it

speaks of a pattern we should model in our lives, and in our life together: Give thanks to God, share what we have, and trust.

It also echoes our reading from Isaiah with its vision of abundant life living out God's covenant. The invitation to the Messianic banquet, overflowing with rich food, wine and milk, listening for God's word, held in God's love, witnessing to God, a light to the nations, reflecting God's glory. There is also an echo with communion as we give thanks, break the bread and pour the wine, and share together. Give thanks to God, share what we have, and trust.

Whether we concentrate on the abundance of the heavenly banquet, the overwhelming compassion of Jesus in the face of grief, fear and exhaustion, or the mystery of communion, the message resounds: Give thanks to God, share what we have, and trust.

Within all of life; give thanks to God. Through better or worse, richer or poorer, in sickness and in health; give thanks to God. When life is easy or hard, painful or pleasurable, rewarding or depressing; give thanks to God. Be thankful. Our attitude to the blessing, the gift of life, should primarily be one of thanksgiving to the divine within and beyond it all.

An expression of our thanksgiving is to share what we have. There will always be people that in a worldly-sense are better off than us, but that should never stop us from responding to those that are clearly worse off.

Life is made of billions of circumstances, the vagaries of history, the lottery of genetics, and all of it – for good or ill – is the blessing of God. Our paths to this point are full of winding turns, climbs and descents, tunnels and bridges, taken by us, our relatives, and the communities in which we, and they, have lived.

A slightly different turn at any point, and who knows where we might be, how our lives or personalities could have changed? Life is complex and beautiful, and we can express our thanks by sharing with others. By trying to lift others up, being thankful for the times others have helped us and hoping that others will help us when we need it.

All of this is underpinned by trust. Having faith in life, in God. Unthinkingly we close our eyes each night trusting that they will open when morning comes. A helpless infant places trust in their parent's arms. Scientists experiment trusting, having faith, that the universe is rational – that the rules of nature do not change and experiments are repeatable.

Give thanks to God, share what we have, and trust.

We all have a part to play in making the world a better place. We might not be able to alter the course of human history, but we can make someone's day better.

A smile, kind word, embrace, invitation, shared meal, or conversation can make someone's day. Giving our time, sharing our talents, using our resources, or offering our money can help a worthy cause.

Stepping back, saying 'no', letting someone else, or making the excuse it's too big a problem, is not Jesus' message to us.

Give thanks to God, share what we have, and trust.

This is the path towards the Kingdom of God. This is the call Jesus makes upon our lives. This is our part in living out God's dream for the world.

Give thanks to God, share what we have, and trust. **Amen**