

27th May 2018. John 6:1-21

**9.30am Communion Service at Christ Church
and 3pm Evensong at St. John's Newsholme
John 6:1-21**

Lord may we hear your message to us today and deepen our relationship with you. Amen.

Not football again!

Just when you thought you would have a nice break from hearing nothing else but football every time you switched on your TV, radio, read a paper... yes, I'm going to mention the World Cup... again!

Be thankful, it has given us all a break from Brexit or Donald Trump's latest Twitter opinions for a while.

Over 23 million people tuned in to watch England beat Colombia which put England through to the quarter finals.

Yet an estimated lower figure of a mere 20 million people reportedly watched England beat Sweden which took them into the Semi final for the first time since 1996.

Figures don't always have to add up!

If people were to read these figures in many years to come, they could decide that the England team had become less popular, losing 3 million TV viewers even though they were winning. Where had the 3 million supporters gone.

Reading estimated figures from one source alone, doesn't always give us a true picture of what really went on at the time, especially if it happened a long time ago.

We have all had recent experience of the World Cup 2018, it was recent enough for us all to quite quickly deduce that England weren't in fact losing supporters, but they were drawing crowds of thousands, all over the country as people were congregating in front of huge screens in city squares or watching the game at their local pubs.

Supermarkets have reported a significant increase in beer and wine sales recently. Also strawberries, Pimms and barbecue sales have increased dramatically too due to Wimbledon and England experiencing a proper Summer.

Relationship v statistics

Exact figures are not really important to us because we all have had the very recent experience of it all; whether you have followed religiously, or you are glad to see the back of the famous England World Cup team of 2018, relieved that they are off our TV's and out of our newspapers for a while.

What is normal?

We can get back to normal at last, back to moaning about the weather being too hot, how we're in desperate need of rain, but now we have had far too much rain all at once, causing floods and mayhem. Why can't things be just right? Why can't our prayers to God give us just what we want in the perfect balance for us?

Feeding of the 5,000

This brings us to our Gospel reading today, where John tells us of how Jesus miraculously feeds 5,000 men. Why is this story still so well-known after thousands of years, and not just among Christians, most people have heard of it still? What is so special about it all. Jesus didn't offer huge digital TV or beer, Pimms or a barbecue. John has told us that Jesus had previously and miraculously turned water into wine though at the wedding in chapter 2. The occasion and context clearly matters in knowing God better.

The feeding of the 5,000 is recorded in all 4 gospels. John gives a figure of about 5,000 men which doesn't include the women and children that will have been there too. In Matthew 14 this point is emphasised as being a count of specifically males and adds that this figure was 'besides' women and children. Many scholars believe that the actual number of people fed could have been as many as 15,000-20,000 people.

So again, just like the World Cup crowd statistics, the exact figures are not the important message that we are to concentrate on. John has made it clear that these miracles are of great importance and what he does want us to concentrate on.

Celebrity not Son of God?

Why has Jesus drawn such a huge crowd? They have seen his signs, his healings of the sick, he is a celebrity to them. The crowd don't recognise him as the Son of God or someone who is to save them from their sins. They want Jesus in a superficial way, to perform miracles for them or their family members. They also did not want to miss out on more of these exciting and miraculous signs.

The disciples have previously been sent out to minister from town to town, and so now wished to escape the crowds with Jesus for some much-needed rest and food. They get into a boat to go the end of the sea of Galilee, North of Bethsaida, where Philip, Andrew and Peter were from.

The crowds however began to follow them again, even willing to travel very quickly through rough country to get to where the boat was going. Verse 4 tells us that it is nearly time for the Passover feast so the crowd should have been on their way to Jerusalem - it was the law that every male Jew was to go there to celebrate Passover.

Jesus is the Passover lamb

It is interesting that John mentions the Passover (Exodus) and connects the feeding of the huge crowd and Jesus walking on water together. He does this so that we make the connection between Jesus and Moses. Moses had led his people out of Egypt, crossing the sea, through the wilderness, where they were miraculously fed with Manna. In John 5 Jesus complains that his opponents do not believe or fully understand him, that he was who Moses had written about in the scriptures. (Deuteronomy 18:15). In chapter 6 Jesus is trying to reveal his true identity and purpose to his disciples and the crowd.

The disciples miss the point again

I feel a bit sorry for the disciples, they're faced yet again with huge crowds of needy people, surely it would be easier if the crowds were to be sent away as they would need to find shelter and food before it got too late. They can buy their own food, problem solved! Yet again the disciples are tested and get it wrong. Jesus has compassion for the crowd of people and views them as being like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus knew exactly what he was going to do, that he was going to have a Passover meal right there with more than enough for all of them.

Philip fails the test

It sounds like a pretty straight forward question when Jesus asks Philip in verse 5 "where can we buy enough food to feed all these people?" After all if Philip was a local to that area he would have known the answer to the question. Jesus had no intention of having to buy any food. He was testing Philip's understanding and of course Philip straight away thinks of money. They would never be able to afford the 200 denarii, around 8 months wages minimum that was needed to feed everyone. He is concentrating on finding a practical solution forgetting the spiritual needs of the crowd and especially forgetting to include Christ in his calculations.

If only Philip had answered "Lord, I've seen you turn water into wine, heal a royal official's son and heal a man who was unable to walk, you've performed loads of miracles. Surely you can just click your fingers and provide enough for all!"

We are just like Philip

Philip answered as we all still answer when asked about feeding multitudes of people, the cost, the resources, we can't afford it, we will have to fundraise, it can't be done. Then we include God and Christ's teaching that Christ and ministry should come first, and money later.

Andrew doesn't do much better I'm afraid as he points out that he has found a boy who has 5 barley loaves and 2 fish, 'but what are they among many' he says negatively. (6:8-9). Philip or Andrew

could only think of a human solution, they did not pass the test of faith in understanding Jesus as being the mediator and advocate who brings us back to God.

It is worth pointing out that the loaves that the boy had will have been the size of small flat pancakes made of the cheaper barley ingredient, being the food of the poor and animals. The fish will have been pickled or dried fish the size of sardines.

John shows that Jesus is in complete control here, like a father at a family meal, administering the food. Other gospels tell us that it was the disciples who distribute the bread and fish to the people. John however makes a point of telling us that Jesus should be at the centre of our attention, in verse 11 Jesus takes the bread, gives thanks to God. This 'giving thanks' reminds us of the relationship between God the Father and Son. Jesus doesn't make a dramatic pleading or show, just a simple 'giving thanks to the Father, trusting that he will provide their needs.

The crowd, now that they were full and had seen this miracle, declared that Jesus surely was the prophet that Moses told of in Deuteronomy 18 after he had fed his people in the wilderness.

They still wanted Jesus on their own terms, for their own agenda, as a political King. They were looking for the wrong kind of Jesus just as we often do today to fit our own wants. The crowd should have been focussing on the Eucharistic meaning of the bread.

Jesus starts with what little we have. We are as inadequate as the early disciples were to feed the multitudes, the whole world, but we are called to come to the table with what we do have no matter how little. We are called to share

Jesus brings us spiritual satisfaction and can meet our needs for healing and practical needs but it is the deeper need to be reconciled with God that should be our focus.

Jesus escapes the crowds to be by himself as they intend to force him to become their superficial King.

The disciples have set off back to Capernaum in the evening in a boat. As night came they had rowed about 3 or four miles, a strong wind stirs up the water. John tells us of another miracle showing us that Jesus is there to save us during our worst storms, when life stirs up for us fearful events that we can't face alone. Jesus walks on the water making the disciples terrified. He then says, "*it is I*", "*do not be afraid*". The disciples then willingly let Jesus into the boat and he immediately takes them to where they want to go.

We have the free will to just let Jesus pass us by. God does send us the answer, but we often do not see it or are too afraid to let him into our boat. Jesus is our saving presence in the middle of all of our storms.

Once we willingly accept Jesus into our hearts without fear then we can begin to bring what we do have to share with others, no matter how small or inadequate.

Amen