

## **SUNDAY 2<sup>ND</sup> AUGUST 2020**

**Revd Alan F. Miller**

### **PRAYER OF THE DAY**

Life-changing God, you have touched us  
and transformed us  
to reach out to all who hunger for  
what only you can give.  
Keep our feet in your paths  
and bless us to multiply blessings to others,  
through Jesus Christ our Redeemer  
and Lord. **Amen.**

### **PSALM 17: 1-7, 15**

Hear a just cause, O LORD; attend to my cry;  
give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit.  
From you let my vindication come;  
let your eyes see the right.  
If you try my heart, if you visit me by night,  
if you test me, you will find no wickedness in me;  
my mouth does not transgress.  
As for what others do, by the word of your lips  
I have avoided the ways of the violent.  
My steps have held fast to your paths;  
my feet have not slipped.  
I call upon you, for you will answer me, O God;  
incline your ear to me, hear my words.  
Wondrously show your steadfast love,  
O saviour of those who seek refuge  
from their adversaries at your right hand.  
As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness;  
when I awake I shall be satisfied, beholding your likeness.

### **PRAYER**

Let us confess our sins  
in the presence of the One  
who blesses us and meets our need:

God of compassion, we are sick.  
We have wrestled all night with worry  
instead of resting in you.  
We have asserted our own goodness  
instead of awakening to yours.  
We have turned away those hungry for your help

instead of trusting you and feeding them  
from your limitless supply of blessings.  
Forgive us, heal us, and help us to hold on to you.  
We call upon you, for you will answer us, O God,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The God of steadfast love is our refuge and Saviour.  
In Christ, we who are broken  
are healed, forgiven, filled, and transformed.  
Alleluia! Amen.

### **MATTHEW 14: 13-21**

<sup>13</sup>Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. <sup>14</sup>When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. <sup>15</sup>When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." <sup>16</sup>Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." <sup>17</sup>They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." <sup>18</sup>And he said, "Bring them here to me." <sup>19</sup>Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. <sup>20</sup>And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. <sup>21</sup>And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

**HYMN 93** Let us with a gladsome mind

### **REFLECTION**

*All-knowing God, you have satisfied  
our hunger at sunset  
and held us close through nights of wrestling.  
Now let the daybreak with your blessing.  
Awaken and illumine us by your Word  
that we may behold your likeness. **Amen.***

These months during which we have all found our lives greatly restricted by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic have been very challenging, bringing huge change to our daily lives, along with uncertainty, stress, and the sorrow of so many who have either died or are suffering the long-term consequences of coronavirus infection and treatment. We have been at times pushed to the limit of our patience, and of our emotional, mental and spiritual strength as much as we have known the threat to our physical wellbeing.

The news then, that efforts to suppress the virus have been successful to the extent that even those who have been shielding during the months of lockdown may now hope for some return to a more normal pattern of life, is encouraging, even if we must all remain careful for our own sake, and equally for the sake of others.

Something that Devi Sridhar, Professor of Global Health at Edinburgh University, said last week on social media has stuck in my mind: Professor Sridhar said:

‘Infectious disease outbreaks reveal how each of us is only as healthy as our neighbour, as the person we sit next to on the bus, and as the strangers we shop with in a supermarket. Think collectively instead of selfishly. We are all dependent on the actions of each other.’

In saying this, she has, I think, expressed something that is at the heart of the gospel stories, and one of the central values that underpin the teaching and life of Jesus: that we do not live as individuals, responsible only for ourselves, but as part of a wider community, society, and humanity, within which we live and for whose wellbeing we all bear a responsibility. Jesus himself said ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’ and that principle of love for others must be the guiding principle of all our Christian living.

It is, I think, a way of seeing the world, and the people who share the world with us, that is very evident in what Jesus says and does when he ‘feeds of the five thousand’ as told to us in Matthew’s gospel today.

This is an event which displays those values of love, compassion and generosity that characterise the way in which God meets the needs of all people, in body or mind or spirit, so that they may be fully well and made fully whole, fulfilled and satisfied as complete human beings who encounter the life-giving and life-enriching power of God in Jesus himself.

Following the execution of John the Baptist by Herod, and perhaps fearing for his life or those of his followers, Jesus takes to a boat and sails to the other side of the lake, only to find a huge crowd waiting eagerly for him as he comes in to shore. Five thousand men – not counting the women and children who would certainly also have been present - follow him into that uninhabited and lonely place. This in itself tells a story, of the great need in which ordinary people found themselves, desperate for signs of hope, longing for good news to lighten the darkness in which they found themselves, always looking for God to act, to heal, to protect, and to provide.

And the response from Jesus, tired as he must be, is what it always is to those he finds in need or suffering of any kind, which is to show compassion: as he has done before, Jesus heals the sick who are brought to him, working until it is late in the day and evening begins to fall.

Having healed them of their illnesses, the trouble now is that the crowd are hungry, and no-one knows how to feed them. At a loss, the disciples say to Jesus ‘send them away to buy food in the villages’ – but for Jesus, this is not the right response. With the five loaves and two fish that the disciples are able to provide, he begins to divide these up and to share

them with the crowd. This he does until not only is everyone fed, but twelve baskets of leftovers are gathered up afterwards.

It certainly sounds like a miracle. By God's power, the people are not only made well, but fed until they are fully satisfied. God's loving generosity is on full display, and those present experience the grace of God in Jesus. They are restored to wholeness of life, their physical needs are met, and their souls are nourished by this encounter with the living God. By all he does and says, Jesus confirms to them what they have already heard, that he is the long-awaited Messiah, the Saviour who will usher in God's reign of peace, prosperity and plenty. In a world full of hunger – hunger not only for food, but for justice, for righteousness, for peace, Jesus shows what God intends, and what God desires, that fullness of life that is the fruit of the good news of the Kingdom of God, for this present time and the world as it is, and for the future that is God's, and the new creation.

But the miracle does not have to be supernatural. Who would travel into that deserted place without bringing at least something to eat and drink with them? Surely many in the crowd had made some provision – bread and fish, the staple diet of their working lives. They might well have thought they had only enough to feed themselves and their families with them, and hesitated to lay out what they had brought, fearing losing what little they had. Perhaps it's only when Jesus takes the disciples' bread and fish and begins to share these, that the crowd are moved to follow his example, and begin to share what they have brought, only to discover that when shared, there is more than enough to go round.

The miracle, then, is what God can do to change people, to open hearts and minds to one another so that instead of fearing other people, fearing losing what they already have, they discover that grace and love and compassion lead to generous sharing that produces something so much greater and to the benefit of all. It is the expression of that care for one another, of loving our neighbours, that is the foundation of every healthy community, society, and nation – indeed the whole world. God's love and generosity, God's grace and compassion, God's wonderful providing, all this is seen through us, when God opens our hearts to love one another, and show that love in compassion for the people around us in every place and every time.

### **PRAYER**

Let us pray for the needs of the world, saying,  
O Lord, attend to our cry, give ear to our prayer.  
God who hears us, holds us, and helps us,  
you are our eternal source of blessing.  
You are our endless source of provision.  
In your compassion, you see our need;  
you heal our sickness and satisfy our hunger.

Hear us now as we pray for the church,  
the world, and all in need:

For our sisters and brothers called by your name  
throughout the world,

Bless your church and help us move forward  
in mission with you.

For the healing and preservation of your creation  
in heaven and on earth,

For the need of the nations—  
wisdom for leaders, vindication and relief for the oppressed—

For those who are hungry, ill, vulnerable,  
or seeking refuge from adversaries and injustice,

For all who need you, near and far,  
especially those we name now, aloud and in our hearts . . .

For the faithful who have gone before us and  
in whose steps we follow,

Wondrously show us your steadfast love,  
that we may behold your face in righteousness  
and be satisfied, when we awake,  
beholding your likeness;  
through Christ our Lord we pray. **Amen.**

### **THE LORD'S PRAYER**

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name.  
Your kingdom come.  
Your will be done on earth,  
as it is in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Do not lead us into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power and the glory  
are yours, now and for ever.

**Amen.**

**HYMN 167** Guide me, O Thou Great Jehovah