

Collect, Readings and Sermon
Sunday 2nd August 2026
The Ninth Sunday after Trinity

Collect

Almighty God,
who sent your Holy Spirit
to be the life and light of your Church:
open our hearts to the riches of your grace,
that we may bring forth the fruit of the Spirit
in love and joy and peace;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you
and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Isaiah 55:1-5

Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

Psalms 145

The response to the Psalm is:
Lord is loving to everyone.

Romans 9:1-5

I am speaking the truth in Christ – I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit – I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.

Matthew 14:13-21

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. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. 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.' Jesus said to them, 'They need not go away; you give them something to eat.' They replied, 'We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.' And he said, 'Bring them here to me.' 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. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Post Communion

Holy Father,
who gathered us here around the table of your Son
to share this meal with the whole household of God:
in that new world where you reveal the fullness of your peace,
gather people of every race and language
to share in the eternal banquet of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Sermon

Earlier this week I took the funeral for a wonderful woman who was a teacher throughout her life, and latterly the Head of an infant school. At her funeral someone approached me and explained that she had been Deputy Head when this woman was Head. She told me what an inspiration she was, and how wonderful to work with. She gave examples of the ways in which she connected with the families of those she taught and explained how much she had learnt from working alongside her.

Perhaps you, too, can think of people who have somehow brought out the best in you. You may remember teachers who were inspiring, or helped you to see your own gifts and skills. Or perhaps you have had work colleagues or employers who have had sufficient confidence in your abilities to help you to believe in yourself a little more; try things out; and grow as a result.

When we open the newspapers or switch on the news, it is so easy to be consumed by all that is wrong with the world. Which is why it is so very important that our focus does not stay there. It is not a question of ignoring the challenges that surround us, but rather of knowing where to place our focus. This morning's gospel reading, the story of Jesus and his disciples feeding upwards of 5000 people, is a helpful reminder of this.

Those of you who are super-observant will notice that, having been working through the thirteenth chapter of Matthew's gospel, in which Jesus has been teaching through a series of parables, we have now jumped to part way through the fourteenth chapter. The lectionary compilers have omitted the first verses of the fourteenth chapter, but it is actually rather important that you know what they say in order to more fully understand the context of this morning's reading.

It is in the first twelve verses of this chapter that we hear about John the Baptist's death. It is not an edifying story. King Herod decided to marry his brother's wife, Herodias, and both left their spouses. We know that John the Baptist was the forerunner to Jesus and a man of great principle. As far as he was concerned, what Herod had done was wrong, and he said

so. Which led to him being imprisoned by Herod. According to Matthew's gospel, Herod would have killed him there and then, but was afraid of the crowds.

However, come Herod's birthday, Herodias's daughter danced for Herod, and so beguiled him, that he promised on oath to grant her whatever she requested. On Herodias's instruction, she asked for John the Baptist's head on a platter. Herod was apparently aggrieved, but nevertheless put John the Baptist to death.

The reason it's so important to know this part of the story, is that as we begin this morning's gospel passage, Jesus has just heard of John the Baptist's death and the circumstances surrounding it. And that is why he has withdrawn. We might sympathise with his desire to get away for a while in order to get his head around all that has taken place.

Just as when we pick up the newspapers we are reminded of all that is wrong with the world, Jesus has just had a very similar experience. On hearing of John the Baptist's death, he has been reminded of the worst side of human nature – the desire for power; the suppression of opposition; the complexity of human desire. It's hardly surprising that Jesus decided to get away for a while.

Except, of course, he wasn't able to get away. By this stage, Jesus has been teaching and healing for some time. People recognise something important about him and want to be with him, learning from him. He shows them something that no-one else does. And so when Jesus tries to get away to grieve, he is followed.

What I love at this point is Jesus's response. Instead of being frustrated, or sending the crowds away, he is filled with compassion. The Greek word here for compassion translates rather wonderfully as something that seizes his guts. It is a bodily kind of compassion which compels him into action. And Jesus's action at this stage shows us some very important things about the economy of God's kingdom – and how different it is from our economy here on earth.

The first thing to notice here is that the disciples seem to be quite sensible in their suggestion to Jesus. It is getting late and a huge crowd has gathered. It isn't safe for everyone to remain in this deserted place. They need food and shelter. And so they suggest sending them away to local villages.

Jesus's response is very simple: "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." Two key things. They don't need to go; you can feed them. The first shows us something so very important about God's kingdom. That it is for everyone. There is no need for anyone to go away. We can all be accommodated. I may seem to be stating the obvious, but recognising that everyone is welcome is not as easy as we might think. Just like the disciples, we can find perfectly reasonable reasons to send people away, when actually we are just failing to see from God's perspective. Think about it for just a moment. How many of our human values are caught up in ideas of what is exclusive. Special. Not for just anyone. And Jesus turns that around. God's kingdom is absolutely for everyone – those we like; those we get on with; and those we do not.

When Jesus tells his disciples that they can feed the crowd, he is asking them to really believe that they can. Again, we can often be so caught up in our own limitations; in what we consider to be impossible; that we don't dare to believe that actually we are capable of so much more than we might think. In my own life, I can recognise that the times I have grown the most have been those times when someone has encouraged me to do something that I didn't believe I could. And that is what Jesus asks of his disciples here.

Not unreasonably, of course, they come back with the obvious answer. They don't have enough food. And Jesus shows them that what they have is enough. In fact, it is more than enough. And in doing so, he also shows that the Kingdom of God is about abundance, not scarcity. There is plenty for everyone; and more left over. The economy of God is not one in which we are fighting over finite resources. It is one where there is more than enough for everyone. And of course the very nature of the miracle – feeding the crowd – shows that in God's kingdom, our nourishment is paramount. All are fed.

There are plenty of challenges that beset our daily lives. And there are plenty more that bring turmoil across the world. Jesus was so aware of that. He knew exactly what was done to John the Baptist, and he also knew why.

This morning's gospel reading provides a model for how we might respond in the face of those challenges. We cannot ignore what is happening in the world – and we are not called to. Instead, we are called to hold on to an entirely different set of values. To dare to believe that, surrounded by God's love and blessing, we are capable of more than we think. And to know, deep within ourselves, that the Kingdom of God is for everyone; it is a place where all are welcome; where all are fed; and where all are held in an infinite and everlasting love. Whenever our actions reflect those beliefs, we see the signs of God's kingdom.

Amen