

Sermon – Feeding the 5,000 *sustained and multiplied in ways unimaginable*

Introduction:

Luciano Pavarotti once put it like this;

*“One of the very nicest things about life
is the way we must regularly stop whatever it is we are doing
and devote our attention to eating”*

[.... the big Man would know]

Throughout the gospels
there’s a reoccurring picture of Jesus eating with people
.... sharing the lives of His friends and followers

.... sometimes He’s criticized for it
.... and very often He’s misunderstood

When He accepts an invitation to a banquet in Matthew’s home
.... he’s asked why He eats with sinners

At dinner in Bethany
.... there’s a criticism about the cost of the perfume

The disciples quarrel about precedence before supper in the upper room

There's a lack of understanding among the two disciples walking to
Emmaus

and hurt feelings on the beach at breakfast time as Peter was
restored to his discipleship

And today when He's faced with more than five thousand hungry people
.... a disciple lets it be known;

".... it's an impossible task...."

Something tells me
that if I were in his sandals
I might have been tempted ***to say the same***

Move;

I see the scene in my imagination
.... I see myself on the edge of the crowd
that settled themselves
on the grass of the gently sloping hillside

.... I look around
and in one direction
I can see across the sparkling waters of Lake Galilee

.... in the other direction
the shoulder of Mount Heron stands high and remote
clothed in snow

There's constant movement in the crowd
as people move here and there
jostling to get a better place

.... there's noise too
voices from the crowd make a constant hum
people talking to each other
asking questions
protesting
arguing

.... slowly the voices still

.... there's a pause

And you hear the voice of Jesus - firm and warm

Shift;

As soon as Jesus speaks
you know immediately He's not like the other rabbis

He talks a lot about God –
but hardly said a word about
the rules and regulations that our regular teachers “go-on” about

He talks about *[well]*;-
about ordinary things
about real life:

about house-cleaning,
farming,
things getting lost,
wedding feasts and parties

.... not that everyone understands [*of course*]
but often it's more like people [*sort of*]
"feel" the message [*rather than understand it*]

.... and Jesus talks and teaches for pretty much the rest of the day
.... the crowd captivated ...

But as the day marches on
we begin to notice the heat is starting to go out of the sun
as it dips towards Mount Hermon
and I'm just beginning to sense of unease with the disciples

they've started to exchange one [*or two glance*]
between themselves [*something's not quite right*]

and Jesus picks up on this too

but [*as always*] He's one step ahead;

His concern is as much about their *physical* feeding of the crowd
as well as satisfying their *spiritual* needs
and He's well aware it's been a long day
and they must be hungry [*by now*]

And whilst it seems *[the disciples]* were
all for getting rid of this vexed problem
by sending everyone off to fend for themselves

Jesus has other ideas that they find a more positive solution

.... no He says

.... *[go on]* you feed them

[and] The rest *[as they say]* “is history”

And the upshot is - that after;

[after what amounts to a quick focus group confab]

followed by a mild dig from Philip about the cost

they “home in” on *[of all people]* a young boy

[I bet that took everyone by surprise]

There he was minding his own business

[if he was an Anglican he’d be sitting in the back pew]

keeping his head down *[like we all do most of the time]*

no more than one of the crowd

.... anonymous *[for want of a better expression]*

.... a boy with “no name”

.... and *pow!!* –

out of the blue every eye in the crowd turn towards him ...

Shift;

It's always seems the case with children from peasant society

.... they're given responsibility early in life

Even today

Asian children of five *[or six]*
care for younger brothers or sisters
while the parents work in the fields

When they are eight *[or nine]*
they're sent out all day to herd the goats and cattle

[I warm to that]

Goodness knows how old this boy was
or what he was doing on the hillside *[as I say he's anonymous]*
but the fact that he had food with him suggests
that he expected to be out all day
[.... peasants can't afford mid-morning snacks]

I picture him
brown eyes bright and responsive as he listens to Jesus

and then he catches the conversation
in which Jesus *[on the face of it]*
is suggesting it's down to the disciples
to do their "Mary Berry" thing on crowd

And who knows

.... maybe the words *were* actually aimed at him?

.... he has food [*not much*]

.... but whatever

.... something inside him responds to what he's heard
Jesus talking about that day

.... he takes it personally

And before he knew it

his precious lunch [*and supper*]

was given over to over to outstretched hands....

[*... handed over and received without question ...*]

[*... there one minute and gone the next ...*]

And then before the whole crowd

those mere morsels were taken and offered up

thanks given

and bread and fish broken

.... and upwards of five thousand found nourishment that day

It's a lovely memorable story

a simple gesture –

with such a powerful message

pointing to nothing less than a monumental eternal truth

We are not to know

if the boy was the only one in the crowd who had food with him
[that's actually of little importance]
what really matters is;

.... that he was willing to share
his merge possessions
.... his bread
.... and his fish

.... it was his spontaneous *[almost reckless moment]*
of generously in offering what he had to Jesus
that made the whole thing possible

[.... that's definitely something worth thinking about]

And we can only speculate on
what happened afterwards to that young boy ...

.... and wonder if he ever had second thoughts
.... or what lasting impression it made on his future

.... one thing for sure
I can guarantee the last this he dreamt of
would be that one day all four Gospel writers
would chose to include his actions in their precious writings

and much less we'd be here talking about it this morning

That people like us would appreciate the truth in the word
and through the actions of this boy in the *shadows[as it were]*

that holding on to things,
actually means
losing everything;

.... and the alternative:

.... letting go of things;
[.... *releasing all to Christ*]
[.... *handing ALL over to Christ*]

implies nothing less than;

gaining everything.... !!

No I doubt the boy really figured all that out at the time
but by the same token
who are we to understand the measure of our own actions??

who are we to know the effects our words and action
have on other people

.... sometimes [*no doubt*] we are criticized for them
.... and very often we are misunderstood

[not that that should make us pore over every little action we say or do]
or we'd lose all spontaneity

But it does mean that we should recognise
that our gifts – *[that however small or insignificant they may seem]*
can be offered to God *[or not to put too finer point on it]*
must be offered up to God

and He can multiply them in ways we've never dreamed of

Move;

Which lead me to the story of one more meal

In a matter of weeks
the disciples and friends of Jesus
gathered in the upper room
and they were motioned around the table

.... He lit a stump of candle,
.... He put a cup of wine and some bread on the table

.... and in simple words He prayed the prayers

He took up the bread and ***broke it***

so He shared again
not just the bread;

.... not just the memory of all the meals they'd enjoyed together
.... not just the journey's they'd shared

.... but the prospect of a new journey to come

And likewise we travel the same road

.... and as I said at the very beginning;

"One of the very nicest things about life

no let's make that

*one of the "essential" things about life [about our faith]
is the way we must regularly stop whatever it is we are doing
and devote our attention to"*

.... effectively sharing the same meal

.... experiencing the same love

.... offering all that we have

.... sustained and multiplied in ways unimaginable

.... and we wonder and celebrate all that happened that day

.... on the hillside

.... above the Sea of Galilee.

Amen