

God will make it more

A sermon preached by Revd William Whyte on the Eighth Sunday of Trinity 2 August 2020 in St Peter's Wolvercote

Refs: Isaiah 55.1-5; Romans 9.1-5; Matthew 14.13-21

As if 2020 couldn't get any gloomier, it appears – from the headlines, at least – that the government now wants us all to go on a diet.

I don't know about you, but good food and nice wine were one of the things that got me through lockdown. As we see more lockdowns in Leicester and Manchester, as we hear rumours of more lockdowns to come, as we witness what might, or might not, be a second wave of the virus, I have to say that the notion of coping with more of this on strict, calorie-controlled, government-approved diet fills me with dread.

And, helpfully – I almost said, providentially – today's readings give me some hope and exactly the sorts of proof texts I'm looking for at this moment. Our Gospel is all about the value of food: as loaves and fishes bring people together into something more than a crowd – in to a worshipping community; as Jesus blesses the people by blessing and sharing their food.

Our Old Testament reading from Isaiah is even more explicit: 'eat what is good', we read; 'and delight yourselves in rich food.' But this – as our reading from Romans suggests – is about much more than physical food. It's not simply a recommendation to have that extra slice of cheesecake. Rather, just as in our Gospel, Isaiah's words are as much more than just calories and the pleasures of fine food. The vision of Isaiah is of a world transformed: a world in which everyone is granted access to the Kingdom of God. 'Everyone who thirst', we read, 'come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy, and eat!' It's a glorious vision of freedom, fairness, and plenty for all – and one written, of course at a time and in a place in which this must have seen unimaginable for many. Thousands of years ago, in the dry and precarious lands of ancient Israel, precious few could be sure where the next meal was coming from; and still fewer could frequently eat what is good and delight themselves in rich food.

What Isaiah's vision did, in other words, was to offer a glimpse of something almost unimaginably wonderful in a hard, hard world. Well, I think we need that still. We need it now. As we look out at the world. As we see the rising tide of death, as we come to terms with the grave economic and social consequences of these times, as we watch other countries and other towns in Britain experience new lockdowns. As we worry about our friends, our families, our communities, ourselves. As all this is going on, we need some sense of hope. Some sign of a brighter future in dark times.

Isaiah gives us some sense of how we might envisage something better. But our Gospel is even more helpful, because it gives us a model of how we might actually respond to God's call – how we might actually do something. It pictures a minor crisis – a moment when Jesus' disciples fear trouble. There are a lot of people a long way from home and they have no food. But Jesus shows them something remarkable. He asks them to find what they can. He takes what little they have – a painfully, pitifully, shamefully small amount. And he makes it into something greater. He uses the tiny, inadequate offering to make something far more than they could have imagined – something that transforms a whole community.

And that is exactly what we are called to do. In the midst of all this, God has not ceased to call us to help others, to create community. However little we might feel we have to offer, God will make it enough. God will make it more – more than we could ever imagine. If only we can find crumbs of comfort, they will be made into something good – something wonderful and world transforming.

I pray that God will bless us, and our offerings, and the community we serve. I pray that we will feel that blessing, hold fast to it to give us courage and allow God to use us to bring hope to the world as we face an uncertain future together.

Amen