



WELCOME TO ST PETER'S ASH



THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AT ST PETER'S IS CALLED TO CELEBRATE, LIVE AND REFLECT THE LOVE OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST

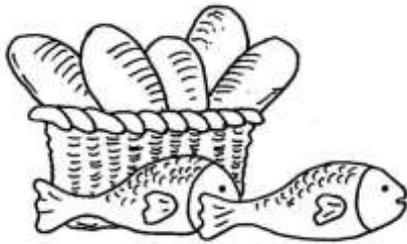
2ND AUGUST 2020

TRINITY 8

READINGS FOR TODAY

Isaiah 55 v 1 - 5
Romans 9 v 1 - 5
Matthew 14 v 13 - 21

PARISH OFFICE: Monday & Friday 9 – 30 am to 11 – 30 am
TEL:01252 331161: e- mail: office@saint-peters-ash.org.uk
BOOKINGS OF WEDDINGS & BAPTISMS – phone for an appointment on 01252 321517
WEBSITE: www.saint-peters-ash.org.uk



All ate and were filled

COLLECT FOR – TRINITY 8

Almighty Lord and everlasting God,
we beseech you to direct, sanctify and govern
both our hearts and bodies
in the ways of your laws
and the works of your commandments;
that through your most mighty protection,
both here and ever,
we may be preserved in body and soul;
through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

CHURCH SERVICES

We are pleased to say that there will be two services of Holy Communion once again, every Sunday. An 8 am Holy Communion in St Peter's Centre, and a 10 am Family Communion in church. We are unable to have both services in the same building at present, due to issues relating to the cleaning that would be necessary between the services. (The usual second Sunday pattern of Morning Worship at 10 am followed by Parish Communion at 11 – 15 am will NOT be happening either, for the same reasons.)

On Wednesdays there will be a service of Holy Communion at 9 – 30 am in church, in the nave, not in the Lady Chapel. Unfortunately, there can be no coffee and chat after this service at present.

Social distancing and Public Health requirements must be met. The two-metre distancing 'rule' applies for public worship. The maximum number that we will be able to accommodate in church will be 40. In St Peter's Centre the number will be 12. To preserve social distancing in church you will be shown to your seat by a Steward. Please wear a face covering in Church or the Centre to all services.

Certain groups of people may be at increased risk of severe disease from COVID-19, including people who are aged 70 or older, regardless of medical conditions. Individuals who fall within these groups are advised to stay at home as much as possible and, if they do go out, to take particular care to minimise contact with others outside of their household. They should carefully consider the risks associated with indoor gatherings and decide, accordingly, whether to attend public worship at this time. We shall be continuing to provide the Pew Sheet services on our website for those who cannot attend, or who prefer not to.

Everyone will have to use the hand sanitiser provided on entry and exit from the building. Also, we will be requesting the names of attendees, and these details will be kept for 21 days to assist NHS Track and Trace if required. It is essential that people do not gather on the church path, at the doorway, in the porch or in the foyer at the Centre.

Anyone showing symptoms of COVID-19 should not attend church due to the risk they pose to others. They should self-isolate at home.

To minimise the risk of transmission a disposable service sheet will be provide rather than the usual booklets. Singing will not form part of our worship. There will be no 'passing the peace'. Holy Communion will be in the form of the bread only (except for the celebrant) and hands should be sanitised before receiving. Kneeling at the rail is not permitted. Only the celebrant will prepare the altar and touch the vessels. There can be no servers or Communion Assistants at present. Communion will be brought to you at your seat.

The services will be shorter than usual. On Sundays the 'sermon' will be the same as that printed on the pew sheet. After the 10 am service, sadly, we will be unable to have our usual coffee time together. Also, people must not stay and chat inside the building. Outside, in the churchyard and in the car park, social distancing rules will still apply.

In an emergency, the disabled toilet in St Peter's Centre will be available. The other toilets are out of use.

The pandemic is not over and we all need to stay alert to save lives. I hope that you will still be able to enjoy worshipping God at St Peter's and we look forward to welcoming you.

(Fr Keith on behalf of the PCC.)

Morning Prayer at 10 am on Sunday

If there is more than one person present, someone may wish to read the parts marked (L), everyone says the rest together. You can say alternate verses in the Psalm and in the Canticles. Please have a Bible to hand. You may wish to light a candle.

(L) O Lord, open our lips

All: and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

- 1 Bless the Lord all you works of the Lord: ♦
sing his praise and exalt him for ever.
- 2 Bless the Lord you heavens: ♦
sing his praise and exalt him for ever.
- 3 Bless the Lord you angels of the Lord: ♦
sing his praise and exalt him for ever.
- 4 Bless the Lord all people on earth: ♦
sing his praise and exalt him for ever.
- 5 O people of God bless the Lord: ♦
sing his praise and exalt him for ever.
- 6 Bless the Lord you priests of the Lord: ♦
sing his praise and exalt him for ever.
- 7 Bless the Lord you servants of the Lord: ♦
sing his praise and exalt him for ever.
- 8 Bless the Lord all you of upright spirit: ♦
bless the Lord you that are holy and humble in heart.

All Bless the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit: ♦
sing his praise and exalt him for ever.

This hymn is said or sung:

Let there be love shared among us
Let there be love in our eyes
May now Your love sweep this nation.
Cause us oh Lord to arise
Give us a fresh understanding
Of brotherly love that is real,
Let there be love shared among us,
Let there be love

Let there be peace shared among us
Let there be peace in our eyes
May now Your peace sweep this nation.
Cause us oh Lord to arise
Give us a fresh understanding
Of sisterly love that is real,
Let there be peace shared among us,
Let there be peace.

Let there be hope shared among us
Let there be hope in our eyes
May now Your hope sweep this nation.
Cause us oh Lord to arise
Give us a fresh understanding
Of brotherly love that is real,
Let there be hope shared among us,
Let there be hope.

Let there be joy shared among us
Let there be joy in our eyes
May now Your joy sweep this nation.
Cause us oh Lord to arise
Give us a fresh understanding
Of sisterly love that is real,
Let there be joy shared among us,
Let there be joy.

(L) The night has passed, and the day lies open before us; let us pray with one heart and mind:

All: As we rejoice in the gift of this new day,
so may the light of your presence, O God,

set our hearts on fire with love for you;
now and for ever. Amen.

(L) God so loved the world that he gave his only Son Jesus Christ to save us from our sins, to be our advocate in heaven, and to bring us to eternal life.

Let us confess our sins in penitence and faith,
firmly resolved to keep God's commandments and to live in love and peace with all.

Pause to call to mind our sins, then we say:

All Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you
and against our neighbour
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry
and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us,
forgive us all that is past
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name.
Amen.

All say The Gloria:

Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to his people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly King,
almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:
receive our prayer.
For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

We now say the collect for Trinity 8 (see previous page):

Read Isaiah 55 v 1 – 5 followed by Psalm 145 v 8 – 9 & v 15 to the end, concluding with:

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.

Read Romans 9 v 1 - 5

(L) Alleluia, alleluia. The word of the Lord endures for ever. The word of the Lord is the good news announced to you.

All: Alleluia.

Now read Matthew 14 v 13 – 21. Here are some thoughts on the readings from Fr. Keith:

There's no such thing as a free lunch – or so the saying goes! That is often true in a world where profit seems to be the driving factor of many peoples' lives. The more money you can make, the happier you will be. The more things you possess, the more your life will be fulfilled. Even in some Christian circles, 'success' in a business, or materialistic sense, is often seen as a sign of God's blessing on you. Those who don't achieve this kind of

success are thought to be somehow deficient in their faithfulness to God.

Reading Isaiah 55 however, would seem to contradict such views. Through the prophet, God is giving his people an invitation that is generous beyond what we, as human beings, are used to. God says to everyone, come and partake freely of the waters to quench your thirst, buy wine and milk without money, eat what is good and delight in rich food that you may live. He warns, too, against wasting our time on what isn't necessary for life and working for things which won't satisfy. How counter cultural is that? Finally, he says that, not surprisingly, this will make it easier for his people to call others to come and join the party as well! A thought for our own mission strategy.

At a time when many businesses are struggling to survive, and we are being encouraged to spend, spend, spend to help the economy, and to 'eat out, to help out', this message may well not go down well with many of our fellow countrymen, some of whom are already experiencing hardship and face the threat of unemployment. But this isn't just an outdated Old Testament message. Jesus, Himself, acts out this divine generosity in today's gospel story of the feeding of the 5000. At the end of a long day listening to Jesus, the crowds are hungry. The disciples answer is for Jesus to send them away to buy food for themselves. Jesus' answer is to give them that 'free lunch', right there in the place where they have come, in response to his call.

So, what are we to make of this 'free lunch' strategy of God's that is embedded in the Gospel message, especially in the light of a pandemic which has reeked unprecedented damage to so many peoples livelihoods? What have we to say to those who tell us that making money and materialism is even more of a priority right now?

In the long term, as Christians, we should be setting an example of greater generosity, reflecting God's generosity to us. Greed and selfishness have all too often marred society in the past, and led to broken relationships and suffering. That is not God's will for his children. Rather, as Paul reminds the early Christians in Corinth, in 2 Corinthians 9 – 'Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.⁸ And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.' God provides freely for us, and so we should provide freely for others when they are in need.

As we go forward into the 'new normal' then, lets make plans not just to survive, but to work towards a change in the way we support one another in future, and try to look at life not just in terms of what we can get and what we can make moneywise. Of course, people need to be paid fairly for the work that they do, but we need to speak out more often about the joy of giving, not just receiving, and about the dangers that money and possessions pose when they become the be all and end all of people's lives.

So, yes, we can support those businesses trying to recover after lockdown. But, looking to the future, we ought to try to set an example and so encourage more sharing and caring that doesn't expect payment or reward. Back in the sixteenth century, this approach was already in the mind of St Ignatius of Loyola. His prayer is just as pertinent today as it was back then:

Teach us, good Lord,
to serve you as you deserve,
to give and not to count the cost,
to fight and not to heed the wounds,

to toil and not to seek for rest,
to labour and not to ask for any reward,
save that of knowing that we do your will. Amen.

Now pause for your own reflections, and then we say the Apostles' Creed:

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

We now say together:

All: You have raised up for us a mighty Saviour,
born of the house of your servant David.

- 1 Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel, ♦
who has come to his people and set them free.
- 2 He has raised up for us a mighty Saviour, ♦
born of the house of his servant David.
- 3 Through his holy prophets God promised of old ♦
to save us from our enemies,
from the hands of all that hate us,
- 4 To show mercy to our ancestors, ♦
and to remember his holy covenant.
- 5 This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham
to set us free from the hands of our enemies,
- 6 Free to worship him without fear, ♦
holy and righteous in his sight
all the days of our life.
- 7 And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the
Most High, ♦
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,
- 8 To give his people knowledge of salvation ♦
by the forgiveness of all their sins.
- 9 In the tender compassion of our God ♦
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,
- 10 To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the
shadow of death, ♦
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

All: Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.

All: You have raised up for us a mighty Saviour,
born of the house of your servant David.

Our prayers, today, are written by The Revd. Carol:

Response: *Lord as we pray – Let the abundance of your love and grace fill us.*

Heavenly Father we pray for the whole of the church of Christ, especially those who respond to your call. We particularly think of our Queen Elizabeth, our Archbishops: Justin and Stephen and for our Bishops here in Guildford Diocese, Andrew and Jo. Keep us ever mindful that we are part of the body of Christ and we pray for those parts of the body - our brothers and sisters in Christ - who are tortured, wounded and cut off because of their faith in you.

Lord as we pray – Let the abundance of your love and grace fill us.

Father God, we bring before you a world that lives with conflict, disease and pain. Where there is division and hatred we pray for peace and reconciliation. Where sickness and hunger are the norm, we thank you Father that you inspire people to give of themselves in their roles as aid workers, missionaries and medical teams, helping to bring relief to the suffering. Let us not forget our own community, for those that work for the wider good, especially those who help people to feel safe and secure, for health and care workers and police and fire services. We pray for faith groups and politicians and for the many volunteer organizations, especially those who enable young people to become confident and enabled in what they do.

Lord as we pray – Let the abundance of your love and grace fill us.

During the Summer break Lord, we particularly pray for the many people who do not yet know the richness of your love and grace. May we, as your disciples today, reach out and share our knowledge and experience of You with those around us. We give thanks for those who are just beginning their journey with You. Help us to know how to feed their hungry hearts and minds with the knowledge of Your love and grace. We pray for the families that find holiday times and being together difficult – let the negatives turn into positives. We pray for those who may be travelling at this time.

Lord as we pray – Let the abundance of your love and grace fill us.

We bring before you those known to us in our community who are unwell, we pray especially for those known to ourselves. (*Space for own prayer*). Father God, touch each one of them at their point of need, relieve their pain, whether in mind, body or spirit, and give them the gift of peace in their troubles.

Lord as we pray – Let the abundance of your love and grace fill us.

Heavenly Father, because of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ, we give thanks for the reassurance that one day we shall all take our place in heaven with you. Along with all the Saints who have gone before us we think of those who have died recently (*Space for any known to ourselves*). We remember the families and friends of all who mourn, give them comfort in their time of sorrow and loss.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake your Son our saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

As Jesus taught us, so we pray: Our Father in heaven....

This hymn may be said or sung:

1. All my hope on God is founded
who does still my trust renew;
through all change and chance God guides me,
only good and only true.

Love unknown, God's alone,
calls my heart to be God's own.

2. Human pride and earthly glory,
sword and crown, betray all trust;
what our care and toil establish,
tower and temple, fall to dust,
but God's power, hour by hour,
is my temple and my tower.

3. God's great goodness reigns eternal,
deep in wisdom, passing thought;
light and life are all God's splendour
bringing beauty out of naught.
Evermore from God's store
newborn worlds rise and adore.

4. Daily does Almighty Giver
bounteous gifts on us bestow,
God's desire our soul delighting,
pleasure leading where we go.
Love will stand at God's hand;
joy will wait on God's command.

5. Still from earth to God eternal
sacrifice of praise be done,
high above all praises praising
for the gift of Christ, the Son.
Hear Christ call one and all:
you that follow shall not fall.

Let us pray:

(L) Lord God,
your Son left the riches of heaven
and became poor for our sake:
when we prosper save us from pride,
when we are needy save us from despair,
that we may trust in you alone;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

All: May the God of all grace,
who called us to his eternal glory in Christ Jesus,
establish, strengthen and settle us in the faith;
and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us and all
who we love, today and always. Amen.

May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy
of God, rest in peace, and rise with Christ in glory. Amen.

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK – TRINITY 9

1 Kings 19 v 9 - 18; Romans 10 v 5 - 15;
Matthew 14 v 22 - 33

HAPPY BIRTHDAY THIS WEEK TO:

MYRTLE MARSHALL (3RD); ELLIOT HARRISON (5TH);
MURIEL BRODRICK (8TH)

There is a free national phone line 'Daily Hope' that offers
music, prayers and reflections as well as full worship
services. Available 24 hours a day on **0800 804 8044**

DON'T FORGET OUR ST PETER'S PRAYER CHAIN

If you would like emergency prayer for yourself or
somebody else please phone: 01252 322292 or 01252
323037 – this is a confidential service.

Evening Prayer for this week

O Lord open our lips,
and our mouth shall show forth your praise.

O God make speed to save us.
O Lord, make haste to help us.

- 1 Bless the Lord, O my soul. ♦
O Lord my God, how excellent is your greatness!
- 2 You are clothed with majesty and honour, ♦
wrapped in light as in a garment.
- 3 The sun knows the time for its setting. ♦
You make darkness that it may be night.
- 4 O Lord, how manifold are your works! ♦
In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.
- 5 When you send forth your spirit, they are created, ♦
and you renew the face of the earth.
- 6 May the glory of the Lord endure for ever; ♦
may the Lord rejoice in his works;
- 7 I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; ♦
I will make music to my God while I have my being.

All Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.

This hymn may be said or sung:

O praise ye the Lord!
Praise him in the height;
rejoice in his word,
ye angels of light;
ye heavens, adore him
by whom ye were made,
and worship before him,
in brightness arrayed.

O praise ye the Lord!
Praise him upon earth,
in tuneful accord,
ye sons of new birth;
praise him who hath brought you
his grace from above,
praise him who hath taught you
to sing of his love.

O praise ye the Lord!
All things that give sound;
each jubilant chord
re-echo around;
loud organs, his glory
forth tell in deep tone,
and sweet harp, the story
of what he hath done.

O praise ye the Lord!
Thanksgiving and song
to him be outpoured
all ages along!
For love in creation,
for heaven restored,
for grace of salvation,
O praise ye the Lord!

That this evening may be holy, good and peaceful,
we pray with one heart and mind:

Silence is kept.

As our evening prayer rises before you, O God,
so may your mercy come down upon us
to cleanse our hearts

and set us free to sing your praise
now and for ever. Amen.

*A Psalm is said: Mon 28; Tue 33; Wed 99; Thurs
(Transfiguration) 72; Fri 35; Sat 46, ending with:*

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever.
Amen.

*Two Scripture Readings now follow (see below). Between
the two readings we say:*

All The glorious grace of God
is freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

- 1 Blessed are you,
the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ♦
for you have blest us in Christ Jesus
with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.
- 2 You chose us to be yours in Christ
before the foundation of the world, ♦
that we should be holy and blameless before you.
- 3 In love you destined us for adoption as your children,
through Jesus Christ, ♦ according to the purpose of
your will,
- 4 To the praise of your glorious grace, ♦
which you freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.
- 5 In you, we have redemption through the blood of
Christ, ♦ the forgiveness of our sins,
- 6 According to the riches of your grace, ♦
which you have lavished upon us.
- 7 You have made known to us, in all wisdom and
insight, ♦ the mystery of your will,
- 8 According to your purpose
which you set forth in Christ, ♦ as a plan for the
fullness of time,
- 9 To unite all things in Christ, ♦
things in heaven and things on earth.

All Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning is
now and shall be for ever. Amen.

Readings:

Monday: Ezekiel 28 v 1 - 19; James 2 v 1 - 13
Tuesday: Ezekiel 33 v 1 - 20; James 2 v 14 - end
Wednesday: Exodus 24 v 12 - end; John 12 v 27 - 36a
Thursday: Exodus 34 v 29 - end; 2 Corinthians 3
Friday: Ezekiel 34 v 17 - end; James 4 v 13 to 5 v 6
Saturday: Ezekiel 36 v 16 - 36 ; James 5 v 7 - end

Gospel Cantic: The Magnificat (The Song of Mary)

All My spirit rejoices in you, O God,
my soul proclaims your greatness.

1) My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit
rejoices in God my Saviour; he has looked with favour on
his lowly servant.

2) From this day all generations will call me blessed; the
Almighty has done great things for me and holy is his
name.

3) He has mercy on those who fear him, from generation to generation.

4) He has shown strength with his arm and has scattered the proud in their conceit.

5) Casting down the mighty from their thrones and lifting up the lowly.

6) He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.

7) He has come to the aid of his servant Israel, to remember his promise of mercy.

8) The promise made to our ancestors, to Abraham and his children for ever.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.

All My spirit rejoices in you, O God, my soul proclaims your greatness.

Prayers of thanksgiving are made for the day that is ending. Intercessions are offered for the church, the world and for individuals, the sick and the departed.

Our Father, who art in heaven ...

The Collect for this week (see first page)

Kindle in our hearts, O God, the flame of love which never ceases, that it may burn in us, giving light to others. May we shine for ever in your temple, set on fire with your eternal light, even your Son Jesus Christ, our Saviour and our Redeemer. Amen.

Lighten our darkness, Lord, we pray, and in your great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night, for the love of your only Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. Amen.

May the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

CARE AND SHARE

Our initiative to help those who may be short on food supplies in the current crisis. Food is being left outside church for people to take for themselves, or to share with others who they know are in need. If you would like to donate any tins, packets, UHT milk etc. please leave it on the doorstep of the Rectory. Thank you.

JULY 100 CLUB WINNERS

First Prize (£79 – 50) – JOY SAVAGE

Second Prize (£33 – 13) – ANNA HUGHES-EVANS

Third Prize (£19 – 88) – PAULENE WEST

CONGRATULATIONS!

SERMON FOR THIS WEEK FROM BISHOP JO

An invitation to sit down

MATTHEW 14 v 13 - 21

Confronted with an eager crowd and tired disciples, Jesus urges them all to sit down. To sit down on the grass. That's the invitation that I want to explore today. At a moment of need, of pressure, of expectation, of crisis, to sit down.

I wonder when you last asked anyone to sit down? I said it the other day when a very proper gentleman was reaching for his feet when I walked in the room. If you're a teacher you probably say it to your class several times a day to restore order or to get to work. I dare say you're used to hearing it in church – 'please be seated' – though we haven't been doing a lot of that together just recently.

At the risk of a little distraction I'm tempted to tell you about the APCM of our church congregation in North Carolina where my husband Sam had recently become pastor. They were a wonderful lot, doing their best to get used to his English accent and his dry sense of humour. In the Q&A after the business someone piped up, 'when are you going to learn some Southern manners?' Others blushed with embarrassment – Southern manners certainly meant you didn't blurt out a question like that to the senior pastor in a public meeting. Culturally mystified, Sam apologised profusely for whatever offence he'd caused and then had to ask for explanation. 'When are you going to ask us to sit down *nicely* without issuing a command' she continued. Still confused, Sam had to think hard to work out what it was he normally said – it's the kind of habit you don't think about. But from that point on he changed his tune. I'm sure if Jesus had performed the feeding of the 5000 in the American South he would never say, as Sam used to, 'Please sit down'. Rather, and you remember this should you ever move to North Carolina, I'd recommend: 'you may be seated'.

Whatever Jesus said, in a moment I want simply to dwell on this little detail of a familiar miracle story that until recently I'd barely noticed before. He asks them to sit down on the grass.

All four gospels recount the miraculous feeding of the 5000 amidst the busy pressures of life. Here in Matthew it's Jesus who was looking for some space for R&R alone. In Mark and Luke it's the disciples gathering around Jesus who wanted some small group time of quiet fellowship together away from the crowds – doubtless to talk through the mission from which they'd just returned. But this wasn't to be.

So we can justifiably assume that for all of them, the crowd is a bit of a problem. Compassion fatigue is setting in when they know they need a break. What would you do in that situation? I'm pretty sure I'd be

among the disciples, doing my best to convince Jesus of the impossibility of feeding so many with all the powers of logic I could muster. Perhaps because of his crazy insistence, telling Jesus that he needs a break. Not least because he needs to face the reality that they have nothing but five loaves and two fish.

I wonder when you've been close to feeling overwhelmed : perhaps this past week, desperate for a holiday. Or perhaps last month, challenged by Black Lives Matter. Or perhaps looking forwards, fearing the strains of covid, whether in terms of health and wellbeing or in terms of jobs and livelihood. Or managing the return to worship in church alongside those who've come to value the livestreaming. For myself I spent last weekend working on the church's latest initiative for addressing issues of human identity, sexuality and marriage – it's called Living in Love and Faith, coming out in November – and I'm never far away from feeling overwhelmed on that front.

I'm willing to bet that you can identify with the disciples: that you're weary with some struggles, whether that's your own experience and pain or that of sharing in others. And it's exacerbated if the church – or worse still, Jesus - seems deaf to your cry. Let me invite you as you listen here – doubtless in the privacy of your own home, to name the struggles. And to voice how they make you feel. 'This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late!'

It may be that all you can see is the impossibility of the circumstances. So, like the disciples, you're already poised and even planning to find another way out, a sort of exit strategy. On the verge of being overwhelmed, some people respond with focused insistence – 'this is what has to happen' – and others with passive resignation. 'Let's get away from here'. I think you can hear a bit of both from the disciples: 'Send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves'.

Perhaps you're in a situation where you feel the pressure of expectation - the crowds are watching and waiting for something to happen, not far from being ready to boil over in their hunger and longing. It's one thing to share Jesus' compassion for the crowd and want your church to respond, but who and how is that going to happen? You're held back by the inadequacy of what the church has to offer. 'We have nothing here but a paltry five loaves and two fish'.

It may be that what you really want to do is get on with the real business of being a Christian – to spend time in prayer, or to be nurturing small group discipleship, or to be proclaiming the kingdom of God and to heal. And so you get disappointed and frustrated that you're derailed and distracted by the demands of others, by expectations you can't meet, by tasks you hadn't predicted, by challenges you can't resolve.

But at least in the situation here, Jesus lands you in

it. There's no convenient excuse, there's no half-time break, there no escape hatch. He urges you to attend to the situation that presents. Even when you haven't got the answers. Especially when you haven't got the answers.

And with that he gives just two simple instructions. At the pragmatic level it would be too easy to dismiss them as insignificant and irrelevant – seemingly not helping to solve the problem at hand. First, bring over the loaves and fish. Secondly, ask folk to sit down. At first glance these present as imperatives – as if Jesus is rudely (at least in Southern company) imposing some rather petty instructions. On second glance, I'd urge you to think again. When you don't have any solutions to what is seemingly impossible, here are two simple things to do. This is our Lord speaking. Here's an invitation to pay attention and wait together in faith. To be nourished together in hope.

Jesus instructions or invitations don't ask us to do something that is beyond us; they're never given to add to our burdens, nor to induce guilt, as if to show up our previous mistakes. In fact for those of us who like solutions they don't ask us to *do* very much at all... nothing that directly sets about feeding 5000 people. Rather, both of them are an invitation to be present, to look upwards, to be with, to faith.

The instruction to bring over the humble offering doesn't deny its inadequacy, as if there were anything but 5 loaves and 2 fish. Yet it acknowledges and affirms what is there: Jesus gives thanks for what is given even (we might even say especially?) in circumstances of scarcity. It's like the widow's mite. The 5 loaves and 2 fish are all the more precious. In thanking God for what there is, for what we have, we look beyond our own resources. We look up, we look to God. Perhaps this is the turning point that brings the disciples to a point of letting go, to a place of radical openness, to hold out their empty hands and hearts in order that there is the space to be infused with hope.

What does the instruction to sit down offer? Arguably it transforms a hungry rabble into an attentive congregation. It seems to transform an anonymous collective into people for whom the disciples can be stretched to find the compassion that had previously run out. Perhaps it enables each of the people to take time and pay attention to those around them – even if only, first of all, to listen to each other's hunger. Certainly, it enables them to wait together and grow in expectancy, an expectancy that might become faith. They don't have the answers but – perhaps! - they're in the presence of the One who does.

The invitation to bring the food and to sit down opens the door to perceiving the love of Christ in their midst. It's from their position seated on the grass that collectively they espy Jesus as he looks up to heaven holding up those loaves and fish. As he

takes, blesses, breaks and gives them in that four-fold description that so intentionally pre-empted the four-fold action of the eucharist.

The story describes how all ate – each had their fill – and with leftovers to feed many more. Just as the scene starts with being overwhelmed – overwhelmed by people, by exhaustion, by need – so it ends by being overwhelmed. But now being overwhelmed by God's provision, God's goodness. Scarcity has become abundance. Faith has been renewed. R&R has happened, if not in the way the disciples anticipated.

Let me end by inviting you to wonder what this invitation to sit down on the grass might mean for you in your circumstances? To the activist it might be a challenge for letting go on the logistics because your impact in the Kingdom of God is not purely about the practical actions – the running into town. To those who may be more suited to the sitting and waiting, your call might be about bringing the little you think you have to Jesus. For all of us I think there's an invitation to cast our eyes around us and check out our company. Do we let the sort of people come close to us that Jesus does? And to those who are tired who are running low on energy or compassion: do you protect yourself from God in these circumstances or will you offer even your inadequate reluctant self? Will you let Jesus take what there is, and bless it, break it, share it – today. And every day.

Jesus is with us. He knows our needs and he knows the needs of the thousands of other people present too. And with Jesus it's not a zero-sum game – as if it's me or you, us or them. It's both-and. And even plenty left-over for those not yet gathered.