

**2<sup>nd</sup> August 2020**

**Providence**

**Bible reading: Matthew 14:13-21**

Normally the first Sunday in the month would be our Mission-Mart and Gold coin offering. We certainly miss Elizabeth giving us an update on our Global Mission Partners. Last week Jeff gave us an update on how we can continue our support during this lock down period. The details are listed in Update for gifts to our Mission/Projects. We are grateful to Eunice who submits articles for Update to keep us informed

A blessing received. After many challenges with our photocopier over a number of years, we have had to finally replace it! We are grateful that so far during the current lock down we have been able to meet our fixed cost commitments. So, after being a budgeted capital item for over two years, we have been able to take advantage of the current cost savings due to pricing reviews of some suppliers, and combined with our savings, enabled us to purchase a new machine. It is in, and commissioned! PTL

I had an excited Bob Hovenden share a “Good Samaritan” story during the week. Bob was walking down the road to the end of his street when he slipped and fell. He wasn’t hurt. But a driver saw the incident and pulled up and asked him if he was OK, and where he was going. Bob told him he was heading for Mt Evelyn. Not only did he drive Bob to Mt Evelyn, he waited until he finished his business and then drove him home! Wow, what a difference this random act of kindness made to Bob’s day. PTL

We have completed our seven weeks in Romans. This week we commence five weeks back to the Gospel of Matthew, and we start with the well-known story of the feeding of the 5000. Please take time now to read the passage set for today.

In the New Testament, there are only two miracles recorded in all four gospels. The resurrection and the feeding of the 5,000. Although the four gospels describe the miracle in slightly different ways, all of them describe the outcome in a similar fashion – *“And they did all eat, and were filled/satisfied.”*

I would like to suggest that the miracle of feeding the 5,000 teaches us five helpful principles for our ministry in this community. As followers of Jesus Christ, the miracle of the feeding, is significant for us. Not only related to what we usually understand in the text, but particularly with a wider focus and application on the hunger of the people.

Mother Teresa would say that people would die in large number, not because of hunger but because of loneliness. So, I will not focus our reflection on the physical hunger rather I would like to focus on the hungers of human life. We suffer all kinds of hunger: for food, for love, for peace as individuals, as communities and as a world. God wills to satisfy all our hungers. But God waits for us to come with our five loaves and two fish. Then we too can experience the miracle when we give up our share to God.

### **The Setting - A Deserted Place:**

Jesus wanted time alone with his twelve disciples. They had recently returned from the preaching mission he had sent them on to the towns of Galilee. They needed time to be refreshed with Jesus. Moreover, he had just received the news that John the Baptist had been beheaded. So, they sail off away from the populated towns to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.

But their time alone was short. The crowds follow on the shore, bringing along the weak and sick. When they arrive, Jesus goes out to them. His heart aches for them. So great is his compassion!

Jesus withdrew to a deserted place to be with himself and with his Father in prayer. Biblically, a deserted place means a place of solitude and silence. Jesus chose those places. For me, as a disciple of Jesus Christ in 2020, I would suggest that today a ‘deserted place’ means:

- It was an abandoned place, where those people, who were deserted by their own children gathered.
- It was a forsaken place, where those people, who were abandoned by their own parents gathered.
- It was a betrayed place, where those people, who had unfaithful friends gathered.
- It was a shunned place, where those people, who were avoided by their office colleagues gathered.
- It was a neglected place, where those people, who were uncared by their rich neighbours gathered.
- It was a rejected place, where those people, who were persecuted because of their faith gathered.
- It was an empty place, where those people, who felt meaningless in their lives gathered.
- It was an evacuated place, where those people, who were removed from their native places gathered.
- It was a vacated place, where those people, who have migrated from their places gathered.
- It was a secluded place, where those people, who had no shelter gathered.
- It was an isolated place, where those people, who were isolated because of their sickness and diseases gathered.
- It was a solitary place, where those people, who did not have companionship in their lives gathered.

These people in our reading gathered together because people heard that Jesus was going to a deserted place. They followed Jesus not by a boat but on foot from their towns. 'On foot' simply signifies that people took initiative and effort to reach Jesus from their towns. Now, we know who has gathered around Jesus. A deserted place, where there are no people. But Jesus is present in a deserted place for those who are deserted by the individual, the community, and by the world.

Do you remember the invitation God gives to us (Isaiah 55:1-3):

*"All you who are thirsty, come to the water! You who have no money, come, buy grain and eat; Come, buy grain without money, wine and milk without cost! Why spend your money for what is not bread; your wages for what does not satisfy? Only listen to me, and you shall eat well, you shall delight in rich fare. Pay attention and come to me; listen, that you may have life. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, the steadfast loyalty promised to David."*

This is the first sign of miracle to realise God's invitation to listen to His Son, Jesus Christ, for an abundant / eternal life in Him.

Are we feeling deserted by Jesus during this time of COVID-19?

He promises today that He is present among us in our lockdown, in our quarantine, and in our isolation. He is present before us, even as He went to a deserted place before the crowds.

Five helpful principles for us to experience God's Providence, Protection & Power

### **1. Motivated by Compassion and Urgency. v13-14**

On one occasion the late Colonel Harland Sanders (Founder: Kentucky Fried Chicken) was on a plane when an infant screamed and would not stop even though the mother and flight attendants tried their best. Finally, the Colonel asked if he could hold the baby. He gently rocked it to sleep. Later a passenger said, "We all appreciate what you did for us." Colonel Sanders replied, "I didn't do it for us, I did it for the baby."

Jesus wanted to be alone, probably because he was tired and grieving the death of his cousin. Maybe both. But he had compassion on the crowd the moment he saw them because they were like sheep without a shepherd (Mark 6:34). He immediately taught them many things and healed their sick friends. John says it was nearly the time for the Jewish Passover Celebration, in order to indicate Jesus' earthly ministry was coming to its end, (John 6:4). Apparently, Jesus wanted to set free as many people as possible, before his hour of death.

While there are many men and women in the Church, who serve God faithfully and sacrificially, there are also people whose ministry is motivated by the wrong reasons. We can do the right thing for the wrong reasons. This incident indicates that our service should be motivated by compassion for others, it is not about ourselves; And with an urgency to share the Gospel to everyone, before the day of judgment. Otherwise, we minister for the wrong reasons.

## **2. Dependence on God for Wisdom and Power: v15-16**

A sign is seen in a textile mill, "When your thread becomes tangled, call the foreman." A young woman was new on the job. Her thread became tangled and she thought, "I'll just straighten this out myself." She tried, but the situation only worsened. Finally, she called the foreman. "I did the best I could," she said. The foreman replied, "No you didn't. To do the best, you should have called me." Over 5,000 people were starving and Philip one of the 12 wanted to send them away so they can buy food. Jesus told him to feed the crowd and he totally freaked out! Andrew said even the combined wages of many months will not be enough to feed such a big crowd. Their natural minds couldn't grasp the power of God. Jesus, however, knew what to do. He was just testing his disciples (John 6:5-9).

As a church we must totally depend on the wisdom and the power of God because the ministry presents us with challenges we can't handle on our own. That is why our prayer life is so important. Otherwise instead of burning the oil of God's anointing, we will be running ourselves ragged burning the wick! He, always has all the answers and knows the best course of action for every situation.

## **3. Anointing comes upon what we Have: v17-18**

A well-known fact is, most of the fortune 500 companies in the world today, actually started inside a garage or a basement. I learned, Google whose net worth was some \$632 billion earlier this week when writing this message, started in the garage of a house.

Jesus instructed the disciples to find out how many loaves they have? They returned with five loaves and two fishes. The demand surely exceeded the supply. But with that scanty meal, Jesus fed 5000+ people. This is indeed a very common pattern in the Bible:

- a) In Exodus 3:13 the Lord asked Moses, "What is that in your hand?" Moses said, "It's my staff". God anointed the staff and Moses could perform miracles with it.
- b) In 1 Kings 17:7-16 the widow in Zarephath had only a handful of flour and a little cooking oil. God blessed these and the widow didn't run short.
- c) In 2 Kings 4:1-7 Elisha asked the widow "What do you have?" The widow said, "Nothing but some olive oil"v2, God blessed that and the rest is history!

Anointing comes upon what you already have. Never feel sorry when your resources are insufficient, or not the latest and the best. God is perfectly capable of anointing and expanding the little things you have if you just use them.

## **4. We need to share our Resources. v14:19**

In the year 1991, Linus Torvalds who was a student in the University of Helsinki wrote a new Operating System now known to the world as Linux. Instead of selling this project for a good price, Linus released it to the internet free of charge, which allowed others to build upon it. Maybe you have not heard of Linux or its founder Linus before, but I'm sure you have heard of the name Android.

Today everyone can afford a smartphone thanks to Android and Android is based on the Linux Operating System. Linux has cut down the costs of web hosting so much! Linux is in your Cable TV Box, in your Car's Audio System. It's even in your Microwave Oven. None of these would have been possible if Linus had decided to profit from his invention, or keep it for himself. Talk about the power of sharing!

The five loaves and the two fishes belonged to a young boy, (John 6:8-9). He could have put that meal on auction and sell it to the highest bidder! But he shared his meal and masses of people were blessed. Likewise, the Church will be able to influence the world on a much broader scale if we share our resources with each other.

## 5. We need to be Team Players or we Fail. v20-21

Herman Edwards, was once the coach of the American Football team called the "Kansas City Chiefs". He said this about teamwork. "*The players that play on this football team will play for the name on the side of the helmet and not the name on the back of the jersey.*"

While preparing this sermon, I asked myself the question, "If Jesus could multiply five loaves and two fishes, why did he need the disciples to distribute the food?" The disciples often attempted to outsmart each other, and I think Jesus intended to teach them the power of teamwork. Many believe that teamwork is a modern concept. It is not so. The concept of Team Work is as old as the Bible.

- a) In Exodus 31:1-6 individuals who possessed various skills working as a team to build the tabernacle.
- b) Nehemiah 4:6-20 emphasizes the benefits of teamwork, and how to face opposition.
- c) 1 Corinthians 12:12-25 Paul teaches us the importance of teamwork in the body of Christ. Ministry is not a one-man show. It's a huge task that requires teamwork. Ministry without teamwork will always fail.

The deserted people or the people in the deserted place were satisfied with the blessings that Jesus Christ gave them. They were not only satisfied with the blessings of Jesus Christ but also, they were full with the forgiveness of Jesus Christ. Now, they enjoyed their fragments (for rest of their lives).

Dear sisters and brothers, when we put our efforts to surrender our deserted lives to Jesus, our Lord and Master, with our weaknesses, He takes us to the pasture land by blessing us and giving us abundant lives.

Are we ready to leave our (towns) self, ego, pride, and jealousy so that we can enjoy our (fragments) rest of our lives with His blessings?

Once, we experience Jesus Christ or are touched by His teaching in our life, we can joyfully say like Paul last week: (Romans 8:35, Romans 8:37-39):

*"What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

The all-conquering power of God's love has overcome every obstacle and every threat that separate us from God to our salvation. This power manifested itself fully when God's own Son, Jesus Christ was delivered up to death for our salvation. Through him, we can overcome all our afflictions and trials.

You may think we have been doing all five of these principles but still not seeing results. But I want to encourage you to keep sowing those seeds. For the Word of God says, "*Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy.*" Psalm 126:5

May the Heart of Jesus live in the hearts of each one of us. Amen...

Prayer.