



S'Marylebone
Parish Church

7th Sunday after Trinity 2021, 8.30am BCP Holy Communion

There's lots of multiplication going on in today's readings. Jesus multiplies the loaves and fish to feed the multitude in today's Gospel, St Paul writes in today's epistle of the sin that leads to more sin and ultimately to death, versus the righteousness that leads to holiness and ultimately to life.

Let's take them one at a time.

It is lovely to note that Jesus performs His miracle because the people have nothing to eat. Clearly it *is* evidence of God's glory, Christ's Divinity, and power. But, all we are told, is that they have nothing to eat, so Jesus feeds them. 'Give us this day our daily bread' as we pray at the beginning and end of this Prayer Book Eucharist. They are hungry, so He feeds them.

This may come as something of a relief to us, because we know that Jesus also shows something of a scant regard for our temporal during His ministry: 'don't look back once your hand has been put to the plough' (Lk 9.62), 'leave the dead to bury their dead' (Mt 8.22),

‘don’t worry about tomorrow, or what you will eat or wear or whatever’ (Mt 6.25). You would be right to interpret Jesus’ call as uncompromising, urgent, and requiring singleness of heart. But here, there is no call to arms, but a carer’s attention to detail, Jesus notices and provides.

It’s not simple, of course. Plenty of people who are hungry today will pray to Jesus for help, and none may come. It’s not simple. But may we be inspired to do as Jesus does for others, to care, notice and provide; and when we ask for our daily bread, may we have the courage and clarity to see the daily bread we *do* need, and the stuff we cling to and hunger after that is not; perhaps an abundance that should be shared.

So to St Paul’s multiplication, of a very different kind, but there’s deep wisdom here too.

‘Iniquity unto iniquity’ ‘righteousness unto holiness’. That is to say, sin begets sin and goodness begets goodness. It’s not rocket science, we see this ancient wisdom at work all the time. Sometimes it’s called Original Sin, or the ‘sins of the fathers visited on their sons’ (Ex 20.5). These Old Testament images are proved true all around us.

It could be easy for us to think in our consumerist individualist society that each of us has a high degree of

autonomy. That, within limits, we are our own rulers and makers. Our memory is only as long as the history of the iPhone, and each person or phase of life or day is our *own* to make as we wish. Except of course (goldfish as we are) we miss the radical wisdom of our great, great, great grandfathers in faith. That of course we are so interconnected across time and space that this could never be the case. Original sin and the sins of the fathers are not dished out by an angry God in heaven, they are simply the natural consequences of the human condition.

We wail and cry to the heavens about flooding and natural disasters, without stopping to think how much this might have to do with our abuse of the planet's natural rhythms and altering of the climate, and why the poorest (often) have built their homes in such potentially dangerous places. We build cities of glass and steel and pat ourselves on the back for being so clever; while we poison the air and the water, and factory-process our ever-cheaper foods, in order to spend more time looking at screens, and then cry 'why, God, why?' when we get sick and die? And that's not even to mention the horrendous violence we dish out on each other in a great historical flowchart of death filled with tribal rivalry, ancient feud, genetic and environmental programming and all the rest.

Each of us is not a blank canvas, we are not islands. The out-workings of our interconnectedness, spoken in the Biblical language of Original Sin, or sins of the fathers, or in St Paul's language of 'iniquity unto iniquity' a cycle of death begetting death, little deaths and literal deaths, is all around us.

So what are we to do in the face of today's readings?
Notice. Care. Respond. Just like Jesus did.

The lives of the Saints are full of those who committed themselves to be small actors in a greater drama. Not shake their fists at God for our own mess, not blame others and sidestep the trouble, not throw up their hands in despair at a problem too big to 'fix', but roll up their sleeves and one small action at a time, one day, one family, one conversation, one by one, to notice, care and respond. Because just as sin multiplies itself, so St Paul tells us does holiness, so does righteousness and truth, beauty and goodness, and prayer and love and service.

Jesus takes small, good things and makes more to feed and nourish. Just as He does for us here in the Eucharist. May we do the same, and indeed, may we be loaves and fish in the Lord's hands, so that through our small offering He can do more and more to retell our story, from iniquity not to death, but to holiness and life.