



S'Marylebone
Parish Church

Lent 4 Mothering Sunday 8.30 am

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The story of the 'Feeding of the Five Thousand' is at one and the same time very simple and richly complex.

As a story it is one of the most vivid and memorable in the New Testament. It is a story that almost anyone who has been to Sunday School can tell, almost without prompting.

The story is vivid and catches the imagination. It is very easy to close one's eyes and imagine, in glorious technicolour, the crowds swarming about Jesus on the hillsides above the Sea of Galilee, the five barley loaves and the two fish offered by the boy, the atmosphere pregnant with promise and excitement.

What might not have been so easy to have imagined this time last year was that the world would come crashing down around us between the Sundays of Lent 3 and Lent 4.

No mass gatherings, no picnics, no sharing of food or drink – not even old bread rolls and dodgy dried-out old fish!

But here we are a year on, and whilst we still live in the midst of much anxiety and uncertainty, we can, at least, gather together for Lent IV, Mothering Sunday.

What might well have started out with something of a party atmosphere on that Galilean hillside could, all too easily, have turned really nasty as the restless crowds realised that not only was it getting late and they were far from home, but that they were, more importantly, rather hungry.

Quietly and unobtrusively, Jesus turns aside to his disciples and asks them what they are going to do about the increasingly restless mob; knowing full well that they will not come up with any answer, because there is nothing on earth that they can do.

Philip states the blindingly obvious: even a king's ransom won't buy enough food to feed everyone, but then Andrew, maybe rather cynically, fetches a small lad and pushes him forward; a boy with nothing more than five small barley flour loaves and a couple of dried-up fish.

Jesus, without hesitating, however, accepts and takes what is to hand, no matter how seemingly insignificant or ridiculous; he takes the boy's rancid picnic lunch into his hands, blesses it, tears it into pieces and, miraculously, when he offers it around, it proves to be more than enough to feed *everyone*. Indeed, in a nice footnote to the story, John tells us there was enough left over to fill twelve baskets.

For John, the story serves a number of purposes: first it is the beloved disciple's version of the Holy Eucharist, missing from his account of Holy Week, and it is also one of 'the Signs' by which the true nature of Jesus is revealed to Israel.

The story may also be, for the disciples, an indication that Jesus will not always be with them in the flesh, and a warning that taking care of God's people - feeding them will be *their* task alone in the days to come.

Whilst it is all of these things, the story of the Feeding of the Five Thousand is also a much-needed reminder to Christians, in every age, that Jesus will take even the most unpromising situations, the poorest and most meagre of offerings and, in his hands, by his blessing, turn such things into rich and bountiful provision. A provision that not only serves its purpose but exceeds what is actually needed.

We might feel we have very little left, no talents, all too few gifts, after so many months of lockdown and restriction and challenge, but Jesus asks us to offer him whatever it is we can muster, no matter how poor or feeble.

If we can muster up the courage to place what we do have into Jesus' hands, even our most meagre offering will prove to be more than enough to do God's will and reveal God's glory in the world. Amen.