

Sunday 2 August – Ninth Sunday after Trinity

Sermon by Wendy Borgartz

An audio recording of the sermon from St Luke's will be available after the service at [Sermons \(tk-tiptree-braxted-benefice.org.uk\)](http://Sermons(tk-tiptree-braxted-benefice.org.uk)

Who likes sweets?

Not a surprise, lots of people like sweets, including me. The good news today is that I have some sweets and lollipops, and you can all have one if you would like one. I will pass them round now and will start with the choir and sanctuary team as they often get left out, then you can pass them round the pews. I hope I have enough. Oh, that's a shame – they ran out very quickly, didn't they? Most of you didn't get the sweet that you were hoping for.

I'm sorry about that. It feels a bit rubbish to be left out of things, does it? Whether it's being left out of being given a sweet, or left out of someone's invitation to a meal or an outing, it can leave us feeling forgotten, unnoticed and even excluded, can't it? Well, it just so happens I do have the real tub of sweets so you can pass them round now and take one.

Being left out certainly wasn't the case for over 5000 people one day in Galilee, as we heard in our Gospel reading this morning. They had spent all day with Jesus listening to his teaching and watching him heal the sick.... and then it started to get late in the day, and they were out in the deserted place they had followed Jesus to, nowhere near home. Jesus's disciples suggested that Jesus should send the people away to get some food from the neighbouring villages because they were all really hungry. This seems to be quite a sensible and caring suggestion, but Jesus had other ideas and told them they should feed the people – how on earth could they do that?

All the disciples could find to eat in the crowd of people were just 5 small loaves of bread and 2 fishes between them all. Just like my sweets, the disciples looked at them and thought there was no way that would be enough to feed all these people. But they knew how special Jesus was, and they were used to doing what he said, so they gave them to Jesus. He told the people to sit down, he thanked his Heavenly Father for the food, and then he got his disciples to hand the food out to everyone.

Now you would have thought that after handing out the food to three or four people, the food would have run out, like my sweets did earlier, but it didn't. There was enough bread and fish for everyone, and not just a few crumbs or a crust of bread, but enough that everyone ate until they were full up. Not only that but there were 12 basketfuls of food left that were collected up at the end so that nothing was wasted.

Jesus didn't simply make sure that his close friends, the disciples, were fed. He made sure that every single person who was present on that day was fed. Every single person mattered to Jesus, and no-one was left out, no-one was left hungry. Not only that, but there was loads of food left over after feeding all that great big crowd! Simply amazing!

One of the things this miracle shows us is that every single person matters to Jesus. Jesus knows that inside each one of us is a hunger, not for bread or for fish, but for a satisfying and fulfilling life. Jesus offers that gift of life to each one of us if we choose to come to him. There is enough life in Christ to go around everyone who wants to receive it. No-one is left out or forgotten or unnoticed or excluded, no-one needs to stay hungry.

And the people all had a choice whether to eat the bread and fish or not. They could have seen it and said, "no, we don't want it!" We too have a choice whether to receive the gift of life that Jesus offers us, or not. We can whether to take that offer or to remain hungry.

Another incredible thing about this miracle of Jesus continuing to give and to give again to the crowds following him is that this all takes place just after Jesus has heard of the death of John the Baptist. We know that Mary and Elizabeth, the mothers of Jesus and John the Baptist, were related and it seems likely that the two boys of a similar age would have grown up together and known each other, even though the first recorded meeting between them in the Gospels is at Jesus's baptism.

Jesus must have been grieving the death of John. How many of us would find the strength to go out and support and help others while in the depths of our grief for a loved one? Yet Jesus spends all day giving of himself, teaching and healing the sick, then at the very end of a very long day he performs this amazing miracle of feeding so many people from so little. Of course, we know that Jesus was fully God as well as being fully human, so

his divine nature would have given him the sort of strength a human who is grieving simply does not have.

But is this a challenge to us? That even when we are faced with our deepest griefs and heaviest burdens, we shouldn't just look to ourselves and our needs, but we should think of the needs of others and try to meet them with compassion and love. When, at the end of that long day, we might have done what the disciples expected Jesus to do: to send people away to find their own food, to meet their own needs, again Jesus's example is showing us we need instead to gather people to us and try to provide what they need.

We might say that our resources, like the 5 loaves and 2 fish, are limited, we cannot possibly stretch to do more. But if we hand over our limited resources to Jesus and place them in his hands for him to bless and to share out, and use them in ways we cannot imagine, I wonder if that sharing, like feeding the 5,000, can do way way more than we could ever imagine it could.

Amen