

SERMON: Sunday – 25 July 2021 – Rev Alistair Cowper

Abundance in Community

Ephesians 3:14-21

John 6:1-21

I want to ask a series of questions of the Scripture readings for today.

1) Is Jesus' withdrawing to the mountain the secret of his success?

Time and time again. We see in the Gospels that the secret of Jesus' success (if we can call it that) is that he withdrew to the mountain by himself (15) where he received the power to walk on the water.

But there's another aspect to this. In going up the mountain to then return and teach the crowds, Jesus was reinterpreting the role of Moses as the one who received the law from God and then brought it down to the people.

Jesus, is now the rabbi who is both teacher and prophet, the one who lives out the law of God and brings it to us as life in abundance.

Which begs the next question of the text.

2) Is our world view one of scarcity or one of abundance?

Jesus asks Philip, where can we buy food to feed all these people.

Philip's response to Jesus was that it would take a small fortune to do so. In other words, "we'll never afford it".

Andrew's response to Jesus was that there was a young boy there who had some bread and fish but what good is that with all these crowds. In other words, "it's not good enough or it'll never be enough".

Both responses display the human tendency to think in terms of scarcity rather than the kingdom of God's attribute of abundance in community.

I have come, said Jesus, that you might have life in abundance (John 10:10) (is preceded by the evil one wants to kill, steal and destroy).

In contrast to the thoughts and words of scarcity, voiced by the disciples, the feeding of the multitude ends with the abundant excess of 12 baskets of left overs and nothing lost (12, 39).

There's a similar miracle story to the feeding of the 5,000 in the Book of Kings concerning the prophet Elisha during a time of famine in Israel. Faced with the problem of trying to feed a hungry nation, there was a man who brought a few loaves of bread and a sack of grain and gave it to Elisha who tells his servant to give it to all the people.

Here's his response,

"What?" his servant exclaimed. "Feed a hundred people with only this?" But Elisha repeated, "Give it to the people so they can eat, for this is what the Lord says: Everyone will eat, and there will even be some left over!" And when they gave it to the people, there was plenty for all and some left over, just as the Lord had promised.

(2 Kings 4:43-4)

Sounds familiar, doesn't it. The contrast between God's abundance and human tendency to think in terms of scarcity is not a new thing.

God's abundance is under threat from the evil one's attempts to steal, kill and destroy. That it of course until Christ overcomes the evil one by his blood, through death and resurrection.

So we can see that Old Testament and New, that the nature of God's Reign on earth as in heaven is one of abundance in community.

It is a communion that includes all and feeds all.

Nothing is lost in God's kingdom.

As the words of Jesus put it, 'gather it all in so that none is lost'.

There will be no wastage, no bits thrown out. All will be gathered.

Later on in chapter 6, John records Jesus as saying, "and this is the will of God, that I should not lose even one of all those he has given me" (39).

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul speaks of this abundance when he writes,

"I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit" (3:16).

Unlimited resources. Abundance in community.

3) Why does faith need to be tested for?

I wonder why Jesus decided to test Philip (6).
Was he asking, are you, Philip, willing to trust your God?
When he asks Philip directly the very practical question of where might we buy enough bread to feed them, is he asking what does your faith mean when it comes to dealing with the neighbours around you? How are they to be fed?

Let me come back to that question in a minute.

But if the question is 'are you willing to trust your God through this trial?' then that question is surely ours too.

Are you willing to trust your God?
Are you willing to trust your God through this trial?
Through this famine?
Through this illness?
Through this bad news?
Through this pandemic?

But if the question is also about how are our neighbours to be fed then we need to look at that as well.

Neighbours are to be loved as they are fed.

As we meet to share bread, how and where can we extend that sharing so that all in our midst are fed?

Perhaps the answer circles us back to the secret for success in that it's as we receive in love that we are able to give out in love.

4) How might disciples respond?

When Jesus realises that the crowds are wanting to make him king by force, he 'went higher and into the hills alone'.

The disciples are lost without Jesus and get into the boat themselves rather than keep on waiting.

And then the storm comes and they see Jesus walking towards them in the middle of the storm.

Was it the disciples' willingness to take Jesus into the boat, despite their fear in the midst of a storm, that lead to them immediately reaching their destination (21)?

John says they were eager to let Jesus into the boat.

Its that eagerness that's the key. That willingness to trust Jesus.

We see it elsewhere in the Gospel story in the willingness of the little boy to share his packed lunch, for his offering what he had, to be used to bless others.

It only takes the lightest hint of consent for us to be blessed by God, a simple tiny desire to be willing to trust God, to invite God in, to share what we have, etc etc

For when we do this then we reach our destination quickly, meaning we find the peace, the satisfaction, the fullness that we all need.

And God will take what willingness we bring and use it, multiply it, in the kingdom where abundance reigns.

And so may we go on trusting our God and see more and more of that divine abundance in our community here in KNEC.