

Eighth Sunday after Trinity

OT Reading - Isaiah 55.1-5 AND GOSPEL Matthew 14.13–21

If you've looked at today's readings, you will have realised that they have something to do with generosity, and especially the generosity of God.....but it is not **just** about the generosity of God. In the Isaiah extract, we have, and which we are perhaps **cautious** about, we hear the invitation:-

*Ho, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and you that have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.
Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labour for that which does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.
Incline your ear, and come to me;
listen, so that you may live.*



Rembrandt's "Isaiah"

“Where is the catch?” we ask. Note the **enthusiasm** that Isaiah uses – and yet, as with the salesman of today, the more the enthusiasm, the more our wariness. Indeed, if we read on beyond today’s extract we find in the following verses, an even **better** deal – an offer of:-

".....free pardon for the wicked who forsake their ways, and the evil man his thoughts!"

– now we **know** that there must be a catch!

But with God there **is** no catch, “Come to my house and all this will be yours!” calls God.

So what happens if we **accept** the invitation? Do we not feel a sense that we must in our own way reciprocate and give something back? – but what can we give to God who has everything, and indeed **made** everything, as a gesture of thanks?

The obvious thing is to give our love, to say "Thank you". That is in fact all he wants from us, it is the one thing he cannot make, and so we must **give** that love, and support him in his work – serving him here on earth in whatever way we can.

When I walked the Camino it was to ask God for his strength as I prepared to leave the comparative safety of ministry in the UK to take on the challenge of a Chaplaincy in Portugal. Estelle, a French girl who joined us wanted to explore with Him whether a move from a comfortable job in Paris to setting up her own rural business, So many others were asking Him for support, guidance and help on so many projects and concerns. Then Manuel from Vigo joined us - he told us that he was walking "To **thank God** for the safe delivery of his twin baby boys". That made me think, "How often do I, instead of asking God for something, give myself time to thank Him for so much?"

The readings today are not just about God’s giving to us, but about his **receiving** as well.

In Jesus' ministry there is a good deal of **receiving** by him. He goes around doing good – yes, but he allows people to **do** good **to** him. He **accepts** the hospitality of Peter’s house, healing his (Peter’s) mother-in-law whilst he’s there.

He **accepts** the hospitality and almost **sanctuary** of Mary, Martha and Lazarus on many occasions.



Jesus in the House of Mary and Martha, ©2011-2014 by Sam Day

He **accepts** an invitation to a wedding in Cana, and many invitations to supper with all the wrong people. He has tea with Zacchaeus the tax collector who he called down from the sycamore tree (remember him?) , accepting hospitality that would have shattered his reputation as a good Rabbi. He accepts the tears and anointing of a woman in a way that confuses and upsets his disciples, who were **already** upset that he had accepted the water at Jacob's well offered by one whom was not just a **Samaritan**, but also a **woman**! That was unheard of!

Indeed from his cradle Jesus **accepts**. He accepts the adulation of the shepherds, and Mary on his behalf **receives** the odd collection of gifts from the Magi marking the shape of his ministry and sacrificial end to come. And, before that end, he **accepts** the cross, and after it he **accepts** the tomb of someone else. Jesus shows throughout how to accept even the **unpleasant** things graciously. How difficult that can be as we all know, no wonder he calls out in Gethsemane :“Take this cup away from me!” ...but goes on to accept it.

The story about the feeding of the five thousand is all about giving **and** receiving. The feeding of the multitude appears in all four of our bible gospels – it is one of the few passages that does.

The story is about the generous provision of God to those in need, it emulates the Exodus story of the feeding of Moses' followers with the mana from heaven.



Juan de Espanal (1714-1783)

The significant difference though between the Old Testament and New Testament stories is the gift of the little child with the fish and the loaves, the boy bringing what might be simply his packed lunch, as a naïve and innocent gesture in an attempt to be helpful. But Jesus the **receiver**, **accepts** the gift and uses it to transform the situation.

The child does not know the gravity of the situation nor the immensity of the resources needed, but he gives willingly, **wanting** to be useful, **wanting** to be helpful, and he is treated by Jesus in a way that both **challenges** and **encourages** us.

It **challenges** us because we notice that even if we feel that we have little to offer to God, we might well have more than we think. It **challenges** us because we are invited to overcome our adult sense that restrains us from contributing. It **challenges** us because whilst the amount of food the boy offered was in the circumstances tiny, it was actually all that he had, and among so many he could hardly imagine that he would get much to eat himself out of it.

But the story also **encourages** us. It **encourages** us to know that God is a generous giver. “Not just enough, but enough and 12 baskets over”. It is a story that **encourages** us to believe that we **do** have something to contribute. That if we dare to actually believe that we can change the world, (or at least the bit where we are) and help God to restore things, then we won't **need** to fully understand the problem - we need to simply hold out our hands and give. And notice that once our hands are truly empty, we are in a much better position to receive the abundant, gracious, and generous gifts of our Saviour.

Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters: and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Do not underestimate the gifts of those who are his children, for God will use them well and all shall be fed.

Let us pray

COLLECT Almighty Lord and everlasting God, we beseech you to direct, sanctify and govern both our hearts and bodies in the ways of your laws and the works of your commandments; that through your most mighty protection, both here and ever, we may be preserved in body and soul; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

May God's blessing be upon you and those you love

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