

SERMON FOR THE DIOCESE OF BUNBURY: GEOFF CHADWICK:
2/8/2026: OS18a:
THERE IS MORE IN YOU THAN YOU THINK

Matthew 14.13-21

¹³ Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴ When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. ¹⁵ When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, 'This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.' ¹⁶ Jesus said to them, 'They need not go away; you give them something to eat.' ¹⁷ They replied, 'We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.' ¹⁸ And he said, 'Bring them here to me.' ¹⁹ Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. ²⁰ And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. ²¹ And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

I wonder if you've ever realised that Matthew's Gospel paints Jesus as the "new Moses"?

Matthew is writing for a predominantly Jewish/Christian audience. Many of the church members were converts from Judaism so Matthew picks up Jewish symbolism and culture in the way he tells the story of Jesus.

Today's Gospel reading is no exception.

Matthew is re-working the story of Moses being given Manna in the wilderness, and applying it to Jesus.

The following elements point to this:

- Being in a deserted place.
- Grumbling, hungry people
- A miraculous provision of food.
- Significant numbers .
- There are 5 loaves perhaps representing the five books of the Torah.
- There are 2 fish perhaps representing the law and prophets.
- And there are 12 baskets of left-overs, perhaps representing the 12 tribes of Israel.

Now we must be careful not to read too much into the text, and look for zebras in the garden when in actual fact they are horses... but it is intriguing to think that these little Jewish tit-bits were enough to capture the converts' imaginations.

You may recall the Moses story. Moses had led the enslaved people out of Egypt through the Red Sea to the promised land. The only problem was that there was a deserted wilderness in between them. This is the desert of Sinai, a most inhospitable place (even today).

On arrival, the people complain:

1 The whole congregation of the Israelites set out from Elim; and Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt.

2 The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.

3 The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

(Ex 16:1-3, NRSV)

In Matthew we have:

When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, 'This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.'

(Mtt 14:15, NRSV)

The solution in Exodus is for the LORD to provide daily manna. You may recall the words:

12 "I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, "At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.' "

13 In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp.

14 When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground.

15 When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat."

(Ex 16:12-15, NRSV)

In Matthew we have:

Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. ²⁰ And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. ²¹ And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.
(Mtt 14:19b-21, NRSV)

This is obviously a thinly veiled parallel between Jesus and the Lord.

You may have noticed a difference between the two accounts. In Exodus, it is the LORD who provides the mana. In Matthew it is Jesus. The difference would not have been lost on Matthew's hearers.

Jesus is the divine one.

But there is also an interesting twist.

Did you notice Jesus saying to the disciples: *...you give them something to eat (v16)?*

The implication is clear; that the followers of Jesus, even when they think they have nothing to give to a situation actually do! I wonder if you've ever found yourself in this situation.

Perhaps you've been too tired to do anything but somehow in God's strength you were given a second wind.

Or perhaps you've been saddled with a seemingly impossible task, and with God's help you managed it.

Perhaps you've suffered from imposter syndrome, thinking you are the wrong person for a particular task but those who called you to it thought otherwise!.

There seems to be some spiritual truth going on here. When we offer what little we have for God's purposes, we discover we have more than we realised!

The famous educationalist, Kurt Hahn, who founded Outward Bound, and the Duke of Edenborough Award, coined a maxim for us all:

There is more in you than you think.
<https://quote fancy.com/kurt-hahn-quotes>

He observed that when one is challenged beyond ones' comfort zone that person discovers resilience, skills and abilities they never knew they had. We, as Christians might also want to add God's gifts to us.

So have you been recently challenged to give beyond what you thought you could manage?

Perhaps you've had a testing time and have somehow managed?

Perhaps you've been fearing inadequacy, and are yet to discover what more may come?

On the other hand, you may have received "bread from heaven" when you least expected it?

Perhaps you been at your wit's end and just the right person or resources came along?

Maybe you've been surprised by joy?

If so, you can number yourself amongst the 5000!

Yes, but there is a challenge. It's to be a giver as well as a receiver.

Jesus said: "*You give them something to eat*", and it was in the giving that a great abundance was found.

How strange it is that giving away five loaves and two fish would leave you with 12 baskets of leftovers!

May we step out in faith, give what we can, only to be fed abundantly in return!

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.