

**Genesis 32:22-31** That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. <sup>23</sup> After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. <sup>24</sup> So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. <sup>25</sup> When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. <sup>26</sup> Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak."

But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." <sup>27</sup> The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered.

<sup>28</sup> Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel,<sup>[a]</sup> because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome." <sup>29</sup> Jacob said, "Please tell me your name." But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there.

<sup>30</sup> So Jacob called the place Peniel,<sup>[a]</sup> saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."

<sup>31</sup> The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel,<sup>[a]</sup> and he was limping because of his hip.

**Romans 9:1-5** I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit— <sup>2</sup> I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. <sup>3</sup> For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, <sup>4</sup> the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. <sup>5</sup> Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised!

**Matthew 14:13-21** When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. <sup>14</sup> When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

<sup>15</sup> As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food." <sup>16</sup> Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."

<sup>17</sup> "We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered. <sup>18</sup> "Bring them here to me," he said. <sup>19</sup> And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. <sup>20</sup> They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. <sup>21</sup> The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

## Jesus feeds quite a few people...

In the last few weeks, we have chewed through a chunk of Jesus's parables all given in a cluster in Matthew chapter 13. All of these parables were about the Kingdom of Heaven — which is like a sower in a field, like tares, or darnel sowed among the wheat, like a mustard seed, like leaven that works through a huge amount of dough. The kingdom of heaven is like treasure found in a field, like a pearl beyond price, like a catch of fish that the fisher sorts through. And each of these images surprised his original listeners, who expected the kingdom of God to come suddenly, triumphantly, with judgement, at the arrival of the Messiah.

Now, Jesus wrapped up his teaching, leaving crowds of Galileans enthralled. He heard of the death of John the Baptist (which we hear about in report), and then he went off to a lonely place to pray, as was his custom when serious prayer was necessary. But the crowd followed him — so again he taught, and they were so focused on following him and hearing his wisdom that out of five thousand men and unnumbered women and children almost none brought food to eat. The disciples urged Jesus to send them home. He urged the disciples to feed them...

Why is he like this? Why does Jesus so tease and challenge his disciples? *Because he wanted them involved in the answer.* And because he wanted them to understand that his preaching was not merely theoretical. It was real. It was now. He *was* the Son of God.

How many of those parables of the last few weeks spoke of **abundance**? In the parable of the sower, the seed that fell on good soil **multiplied 30 times, 60 times or even a hundred times**. Even the least of these figures is a good yield. Remember how the tiny **mustard seed** grew into such a **large shrub**? Remember how the small **piece of leaven** lifted **dough** enough to feed a village? Jesus has preached this. He wanted to show that it was real. He didn't *need* to feed the crowd. He *wanted* to feed them, to bless them, to let them know that the Kingdom of Heaven was real.

Now, if you've been to my Bible Course, or heard me preaching much, you know that the Old Testament is the vital context that brings meaning to the words and happenings of the New. So, were there miraculous feedings in the Old Testament? Look no further than the **mannna** that fell during the exodus. For forty years God fed his people in the wilderness, by his grace. Would it surprise you that centuries after the exodus, and after the Babylonian exile, as messianic hope began to grow among post-exilic jews, they saw the expected king as **a new Moses**, leading a new exodus, and God's miraculous provision would accompany him? Would it surprise you that this expectation was encoded in the evolving practice of the **passover meal**? During the meal a piece of unleavened bread would have been hidden, only to be revealed at the end of the meal: a promise that God would send his rescuer, the Messiah, to save the people from all rule other than God's rule? Miraculous feeding was associated with the Messiah.

There's another minor miraculous feeding in the Old Testament. In 2 Kings, 4 we may read of Elisha, Elijah's successor, feeding 100 men with 20 small barley loaves. Where one prophet manages to stretch the food a little, Jesus goes far, far further.

Now, what does he do when enacting the miracle? He **took**, and he **thanked** God, and he **broke** and he **gave**. Mark and Luke say the same. John's gospel is different only in the specific words used. Where do you hear those same actions repeated? At the last supper, and at each communion.

John's gospel very explicitly links the miracle and the last supper, but I think it bears observation that the verbs are the same in the same order in each story — **he took, he blessed, he broke, he gave**. And what was it that Jesus broke and gave to his disciples at the last supper? He gave the special, hidden, set-aside flatbread — the one that meant 'Messiah', and the abundance that would follow his coming!

So Jesus preached abundance in the kingdom, then gave a miracle of kingdom abundance before instituting a meal that went on pointing to his loving abundance.

What now? We are about to remember that miracle again — through communion. But miraculous meals don't happen each week, do they? I think the challenge is for us to start acting like we all have the abundance we need, and trust that God *will be* abundant to us, according to that trust. People who have all they need rarely see God pulling through for them — he doesn't need to! People who are sacrificial in giving of themselves, their stuff, their time and their talents get to see far more of God. It's the ones who trekked around the lake for the sake of hanging on to Jesus's word that received the meal.

This abundance is a blessing, but a challenge too. Do you and I trust God's abundance? Are we willing to test the theory? Are we willing to accept the adventure? Are we ready to be blessed?

That's something we need to think about, each of us.

Amen.

SDG