

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
Year A - 2/8/2020

Genesis 32:22-31

Psalm 17:1-7,16

Romans 9:1-8

Matthew 14:13-21

In the name of the Trinity; Creator, Redeemer, and Life-Giver...

There's a wonderful convergence today between the Gospel passage of the feeding of the 5000 and the events of baptism and admission to communion that we celebrate today. And it's around the theme of **abundance**. Now clearly, the Gospel passage is all about abundance - a huge crowd of people, fed with such a small amount - and even an abundance left over; 12 baskets full, we are told.

But where is the abundance in baptism? It's certainly not found in the amount of water we use! No full-immersion baptismal font here, where we can send our candidates into the depths of the water, to come up dripping wet and gasping for air after plunging down into the water.

And what about communion? It's not much, on the face of it, is it? One small wafer - not much bigger than a ten cent piece; placed into the hands. Not even, at the moment, a generous glug of wine to go with it, as we live amongst very wise and prudent health restrictions!

So, where is the abundance? As with many things in the church, the answer to that question lies behind the action itself - in the mystery of the sacrament. Both baptism and communion are what we call in the church a Sacrament; a word we use to describe something that means far more and has a much deeper meaning than just the outward actions that are performed or the words that are said.

It is not magic, there are no smoke and mirrors, there is nothing up my sleeve this morning. And yet, to try and describe what actually happens in baptism or in the act of the communion is almost impossible - that is why we resort to symbols and

signs; many of them very ancient, steeped in the tradition of the church; to try and explain or comprehend what is happening.

For baptism it is done using ancient and deep symbols - water, and oil, and light - and invoking ancient and deeply meaningful words. It calls forth the Holy Spirit; that most elusive of all our images of God, to come upon the one being baptised and enter them, to strengthen, to protect, to inspire, to love and nurture. This is how we welcome people into the life of the church - a church with an abundance of people all around the world.

And in the case of communion, we do it by re-telling the story of Jesus, dining among his friends, and offering them the most astonishing gift - the gift of his very self, to feed them, to sustain them. Take... Eat... this is my body. Take... Drink... this is my blood. And somehow, in this almost unbelievable, incredible event, Christians find a meaning and a strength that feeds, nourishes, and sustains them.

We are accustomed to thinking of abundance as somehow requiring a lot of something. An abundance of money might conjure up figures with lots of zeroes; millions of dollars. An abundance of friends might, for some, mean being popular, the life of the party. An abundance of possessions might make us think that we would have all the latest gadgets.

In fact, God's idea of abundance is very different. Because it is all about an abundance of life. Meaning and purpose take on far greater importance than the sheer amounts of things. And the act of baptism provides the spark for that purpose, and the regular act of communion provides the food for the journey.

These two sacraments of Baptism and Communion have been practiced within the Christian Church since its inception. And so, this morning, John, Helen, Evelyn, Sascha, and Jensen come seeking that meaning and purpose in their lives; come to make promises (or have promises made on their behalf) that they will allow God to shape their lives through the Holy Spirit, which brings forth the abundance...

Because the real wonder of this story is that it continues: God still cares deeply and passionately for those who are most vulnerable - the poor, the immigrant, the hungry - and God continues to use us to care for them. And it is by the blessing that we receive in this place that we are strengthened for this service. As baptized members of God's family; as those who gather regularly around this altar to be fed, we can experience the compassion of God, and the abundance of God in our lives.

The tale of the feeding of the 5000 bids us remember how little it sometimes takes to make a feast, how little an action can actually make an enormous difference to someone, and that where there is blessing, there is always enough. And then some.

The modern American Christian poet, Jan Richardson gathers together the threads of what I have been trying to say, in this poem, entitled the Blessing of Enough...

I know how small
this blessing seems;
just a morsel
that hardly matches
the sharp hunger
you carry inside you.

But trust me
when I say—
though I can scarcely
believe it myself—
that between
and behind
and beneath
these words
there is a space

where a table
has been laid
a feast has been prepared
all has been
made ready
for you
and it will be
enough
and more.

May God bless you, John, Helen, Evelyn, Sascha, and Jensen, in your lives ahead - and may you know God's compassion in your life, and understand something of the abundance promised to you - life beyond belief - and more...

In the name of Christ. Amen.