

A MINDSET OF ABUNDANCE NOT A MINDSET OF SCARCITY

Matthew 14: 13-21

It's been a strange four months since lockdown started at the end of March. Who would have thought that our churches would be completely closed for worship? As soon as that happened we were faced with a challenge – how do we keep in touch with our congregations of St Mary's and St Francis - how do we sustain and nurture our faith – how do we keep worship going? We did what the vast majority of churches in the UK did – we made the decision to go online. None of us had any real experience of how to do this. We didn't even know at the outset that it was possible to upload video to our websites.

We could have said “We don't have the expertise to do this. The technology is beyond our capability. It isn't possible. So we'll just send out paper copies of sermons and notice sheets every week and wait until our churches can open before we get back to worship.” However, we, along with many other churches, took up the challenge and, by perseverance, we learned how to embrace the technology. Many times we developed entirely new skills we didn't think were possible. We had a ‘Can Do’ attitude. So, we have been able to develop an imaginative, stimulating and challenging online worship - not just Sunday services but Messy Church as well. Not forgetting just how we have all fallen in love with ‘Zoom’, without which we would have struggled with Ministry Team Meetings, Pastoral Care Meetings, Vision Meetings, debates and ‘Coffee and Chat’ sessions on Thursday afternoons. We love ‘Zoom’ so much that we often feel ‘Zoomed Out’! We are still learning and our next challenge is to record the service as it happens and put it on our websites later in the day. Watch this space.

Believe it or not, we have had some fun doing this – it sounds unlikely, but it's true. I shan't forget recording the Maundy Thursday meditation in my summerhouse with peaceful birdsong in the background – that is until the local parakeet population started fighting on the summerhouse roof. Who can forget the plaintive phone call from Hazel at 8.30 on a Saturday morning? “You couldn't do me a favour and come back to St Francis this morning and robe up again? I accidentally deleted the communion bit of the service!” So we did “take two” an hour or so later. And will we ever get over recording the sermon for our NHS service? I think we did it in four takes in the end – in between me getting the nationalities of the nurses looking after Boris Johnson

mixed up and then recording “365 years a day” instead of “365 days a year. You may not know that our videos have subtitles. We didn’t know either until someone pointed out that in the NHS sermon, they translated “Aneira was born” as “An IRA was born”

Instead of having negative thoughts of “We can’t do this”, we set out from the beginning to be positive and think: “We can do this – this is not impossible”. We could have had a mindset of scarcity, but instead we had a mindset of abundance. Now, I know what you’re thinking “Why is he wittering on about audio and video recordings, outtakes, and pottering with computer technology in St Mary’s and St Francis? What’s the connection with our Bible readings today?”

Well, the reason is that in our Gospel reading (the feeding of the five thousand) the disciples have a mindset of scarcity. They think that feeding all those people with five loaves and two fishes is completely and utterly impossible. Jesus, however, shows them that they should have a mindset of abundance. So the meagre five loaves and two fishes is multiplied and is so abundant that there are twelve baskets of leftovers (one for each disciple). We see here what Jesus does with very little. This miracle is so important that it’s the only one that makes it in all four gospels. The extent of the abundance in this miracle is quite astounding. If you think that we get about 200 people in St Francis on Christmas Eve for our Lighting the Lamps service, 25 times that congregation are fed from just from five loaves and two fish. This is a truly staggering miracle. It’s a miracle worked through the disciples. Here’s how it pans out:

“You give them something to eat”

Jesus did not feed 5000- the disciples did

Jesus uses the resources we have- ABUNDANCE

not what we don’t have - SCARCITY

The disciples could only find 5 loaves and 2 fish – SCARCITY

They ended up with twelve baskets of leftovers - ABUNDANCE

The disciples wanted to send the crowd away

SCARCITY

The crowd remained as a community and followed Jesus – ABUNDANCE

The disciples see a need – like Jesus they are touched with compassion. The people need to be fed and they want to help in the same way that Jesus has helped the crowds. They come up with what appears to them to be a logical

solution – send the people away to the villages to buy food. Jesus doesn't dismiss this idea at all. In fact what he does is turn it back to them – he says, "You give them something to eat" and when Jesus says: "You give them something to eat," it's as if he's daring the disciples. He's saying "I dare you to take me at my word. Do that and see what happens."

Even though they only have this meagre amount of food, they give it to Jesus. And here's the great bit. Jesus takes what appears to them to be small and insignificant, lifts his eyes to heaven, blesses it, breaks it and gives it back to the disciples. It's mysterious and awesome because through breaking and blessing and giving back, there is abundance.

How often do we get ideas or hear pleas for help and think to ourselves "I'd like to do so and so, or I'd really like to help here, but what can I offer? I don't seem to have any skills in that task and even if I did my contribution would be pretty insignificant." That's exactly how the disciples felt until Jesus got involved in the situation. They had this brilliant logical idea to feed the people, but it wasn't quite focussed. They focussed on scarcity - and the transformation to abundance happens when the disciples offer what little they have to Christ to do with it what he will. And now their problem is solved – the solution was in their hands all the time – but it needed to be offered to Christ first before it became effective. When ideas are offered to Christ in this way, he gives them back to us multiplied many times and empowers us to serve him in a way that we could never dream of.

It works whenever we are close enough to him to catch a glimpse of what he's doing and how we can help too. We dive in headfirst with our ideas – we offer what little we have. In this miracle it was five loaves and two fishes – but it might just as well be a sense of humour, money, time, energy, practical skills, artistic gifts or even a listening ear. Whatever we have to offer, Christ takes it, holds it before God, blesses it, breaks it ready for use and gives it back to us so that we can then take that and share with those who need us. And what we originally offered to Christ is both ours and his – what we originally thought of as scarce Jesus makes abundant and energises it. It comes back to us as something much greater, more powerful and more mysterious. That's what happens when we offer what we believe to be our meagre talents and resources to Christ in faith.

So we here in St Mary's and St Francis are in a new phase of our ministry. We've been able to cautiously worship as a physically gathered community

again, even though the way we do this seems alien and uncomfortable for many of us. We have the germ of a new vision for our two churches. Now is the time for us to have this mindset of abundance not scarcity. It's the time for us to have a 'Can Do' attitude not simply thinking that it's too difficult to reach out to, and engage with, our community – that it's too difficult to grow our congregations – or even that there are too many barriers to St Mary's and St Francis working far more closely in 'one bubble' as Ken mentioned in his sermon last month. Let us pray that Jesus can transform us all from people fixated with scarcity to a people filled with the abundance and energy of the Holy Spirit. We have already proved during lockdown that our gifts can be multiplied beyond our wildest dreams if we offer them to God to be blessed, broken and given back to us. Let's carry that mindset on as we develop our new vision for mission here in West Wickham.

Heavenly Father, may we find many signs of abundance all around us in our lives. May our hearts fill with gratitude for the many blessings and gifts we have already been given and that you have multiplied. May we be ready and open to receive even more abundance in our lives, our churches and our community.

AMEN

Prayer Pointers

That all at St Mary's and St Francis may be energised by the Holy Spirit to have a spirit of abundance. That we can work together as one body, united in Christ, to bring the Kingdom of God to our community in West Wickham and that we may see possibilities not barriers in our new vision project.

As we think about the miracle of feeding the 5000, we hold before God all in our world who go hungry at this time – especially those in refugee camps who are also struggling with disease. We pray for aid agencies working to bring relief in these situations.

We continue to pray for all those in our country and abroad dealing with the Covid19 situation especially for Governments putting in place measures to try to halt its spread. Help us all to be responsible in the things that we do in our lives to prevent the spread of the virus by taking heed of the recommended precautions and avoiding situations that may make things worse.

Continue to pray for all those without work as more and more people are made redundant every week. For those seeking work where fewer and fewer

jobs are available. Pray especially for those with families to support and who are worried about how they are going to pay bills and buy enough food. For all in Job Centres and voluntary agencies who work to help find new work for the unemployed.

We pray for those who have committed crimes and especially today we pray for those who broke into St Francis last week. Whatever their problems may be, we pray that they may be helped to see the consequences of their actions. We also offer them our forgiveness. We pray for the police whose difficult job it is to bring criminals to justice.