

Feeding the multitudes

All four gospels carry the story of the feeding of 5000 people. The first three gospels make it clear that the disciples were anxious and were urging Jesus to dismiss the crowds to go and find food elsewhere.

“They need not go away,” said Jesus. “You feed them.”

Oh, come on, Jesus! What will that cost? Cash we don't have - more than half a year's wages for a common worker!

Are there parallels here for us? Too many immigrants, refugees included, flocking here today, expecting to have their needs addressed? How can our country afford it? Send them away!

According to John's account (the only one which names concerned disciples) Jesus knew what he would do. Andrew says, “There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fishes, but what are they among so many?” The same food tally is given in the other accounts, but these make it clear that this was the entire food store of the disciples. The lad mentioned by John must have been a young associate of theirs carrying their common lunch.

Why should we suppose that Jesus' band were the only people to have ventured into the countryside with provisions? We can't deny that a miracle took place - all the gospels assert this - but who believes in magic?

Miracles happen every day; we even have a church in Bedford named ‘The Miracle Church’, because the people of the Caribbean community did not know how the building they wanted could be afforded - but it happened!

So Jesus told his disciples, “You feed them.” He broke up their lunch, telling them to share it out. They did so, and were Amazed that everyone got fed, with so much food to spare!

I believe that the generosity of Jesus and his followers inspired more generosity in the crowds around. (We might look at the jolly children's hymn, ‘Magic Penny’ - “Love is something if you give it away.. .You'll end up having more!”)

Now regard the imbroglio our government has encountered, trying to send the ‘immigrants’ away. Perhaps you and I cannot sort out the mess made by governments and officials; as Christians, we should pray for our leaders to deal justly and wisely rather than hunt for someone to blame.

Meanwhile, let us look inside ourselves. Jesus tells us to be generous. “He had compassion on the multitudes” (Mark6.34). And there is much compassion out there: look at the food in the superstores donated to foodbanks, for instance.

We see people bedding down in shop doorways. It isn't right. Jesus says, “Don't judge them”. We live in a democracy, we can influence our politicians to do what we think is right. People sometimes mess up their lives: they are still people and God loves them. Don't we all know someone who has messed up? We have prayer: it seems not enough. There are resources out there we know little about. Jesus knows. “You feed them,” he said.

Amen, Jesus, we trust you. Give us courage and wisdom, Lord.

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