

## Sermon Archive 352

Sunday 25 July, 2021

Knox Church, Ōtautahi, Christchurch

Lesson: John 6: 1-21

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



In this sermon, I want to present eight short vignettes, based around eight characters from this passage, followed by one wee proclamation of the One who brings the eight all together.

-ooOoo-

**Number One.** If you use your imagination, imagine that this one character speaking just now is a large crowd. While a single individual may indeed have a single opinion, a single concern, who knows what a crowd is thinking! Some of me votes National or ACT; some of me votes Labour, Green, Maori or Independent. Goodness knows where I, the crowd, actually fall. And some of me is old, and some is young. Some of me is poor, and some of me is wealthy. Some owns property, and some is renting. "Diverse", you might call us. All this notwithstanding, most of me knows someone who is sick (sickness - the great leveller). And I have concern for those I know who are sick. So in my "impossible to categorise" capacity, with my deep concern for my loved ones who are sick, I'm out there in the world, looking for something or someone who can make a difference. Healing. Wholeness. The coming right of the important things that enable us to live. We, the crowd, may seem to you to be a big, mixed, assorted mass of human stuff. But we - the people at large - are united in our vulnerability. Last week you thought about strangers you didn't yet know, but who were sheep without a shepherd. That's us. We're back. And we're character number one in your sermon. The great crowd sweeping our world for someone who'll make a difference.

**Number Two.** I'm Philip. Character Number Two in your sermon, I'm someone who sees Character Number One - the crowd. I'm quite unusual, actually. Do you have any idea how many people are confronted with huge crowds so full of need, and never see. I don't know. Blame my mum; she showed me homeless people, and ill people; she grew me to be (quote / unquote) my brother's keeper. We noticed things . . . no, we noticed **people**. So I said to him, God, look at all these

people!

Well, actually, let's do an editorial check here. I'm presenting myself as someone already aware of the people, the needs of the people. What the text actually says is that **he** asked me a question: "where are we to buy bread for these people to eat". The text says also "he said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do". As if he'd need to test me to make me notice the needs of the crowd around me! I think the text presents him as someone who doubts me too much. Surely I'd see hunger within the people, without him asking me about it. Surely, unprompted by the Christ, we'd just notice the people.

Or maybe not. Maybe there's an interesting question about me lurking in between the lines. Never mind!

**Number Three:** I'm Andrew. Now that Philip's identified a crisis in the community, hunger among the people, I'm scanning the landscape for something to meet the need. You might assume that I'm practical - something of the quarter-master in me. A desire to fill a space with a resource. A desire to meet a lack with a plenty, a problem with a solution, a shortage with a surfeit. I know the hunger and the pantries. If I can, I want to use my knowledge of stuff in the community to bring them together.

And just now (maybe thanks to Philip) I can see some hungry people. I also can see a boy with a few bits of food. Is it going to work? My name is Andrew and I'm going to shift and shake things!

Truth to tell, as I look at the crowd and boy's lunch box, the maths isn't adding up. The need is huge, and the resource is tiny. Maybe there's something else that can bridge the gap. Don't know what it is just now - or if it even exists. But my name is "Andrew", and I'm going to make it work . . . God willing, it will work. Yeah, maybe there needs to be a god.

**Number Four:** Hello! Who are you? I'm Russell. I'm ten years old. Wasn't expecting to testify from a pulpit. Don't really want to. To be honest, I'd just gone fishing - me and the fish. It's nice fishing. Quiet down by the water, just me and "stuff". (The sermon writer keeps wanting to say "just me and my thoughts", but I've fought him off, cause ten year olds don't have thoughts - they have "stuff". So it's me and my stuff - and some fish - oh, and yeah, some bread. Then they tell me to give it away.

I don't know, and you'll never know what I said to that. But yeah, I gave it away. Children aren't meant to argue with the grown-ups. They tell me it just might start something.

**Number Five:** Back to the large crowd who spoke to you earlier. We're still diverse. We're still hard to pin down. We're still attached to those who need to be healed. But just now we're sitting down. There's grass on the ground, so we're sitting down. And even though it doesn't make much sense, there's something that's happened just now among us, that's caused us to want to say . . . we don't know what we want to say. But, as a prayer of thanksgiving is said, and food begins to circulate, we want to say something about the person around whom this all is becoming a wee bit strange.

**Number Six:** Don't laugh, but I'm a left-over fish. In your world, you clever people who are worried about the planet are keen not to have too much of me. To have fish harvested from the ocean, then not eaten by the people, is to be avoided. In your world, I'm waste - and good on you for wanting to reduce me. Imagine living, being harvested, being cooked and served, then just thrown away. Manage your kitchens, people! But yes, that's a modern spin on who I am. In the olden days, in this story of yours, the left over fish is sign of enormous plenty - of someone's god providing beyond our need. So I'm happy - and slightly honoured - to be cast in that role. (The table is set, and your cup overflows.)

But still I'm left with a legitimate question for you people who love to hear that five thousand people were fed. The question is what are you going to do with me? The left-over? Are you going to have to think about what you've received, that is more than you need? Are you going to have to think about the miraculous provision from the basket of the boy who didn't understand anything of what was going on around him? Are you going to have to think about what it means to live in a world where the wealthiest 1% of the population owns 43% of the wealth? The sin of the hoarded left-over . . .

Don't worry too much about what I say. I'm just a left-over fish.

**Number Seven:** *We're* not a cast-off fish. We're people of some significant political pull. And if someone can take the offering of a silly boy, and make it work for a whole lot of people, then we would like to make this One our King. Come here, prospective King. Have we got a movement, a throne, a CAUSE, for

you to take!? Let's make it political!

Hang on! Why are you running away from us? Don't you want to be our king?

**Number Eight:** That stuff with all the people, and all the hunger, and all the need and pressure now is done and gone. I still don't know what happened there, and how all the people were fed. I love but hate all that. God, why can't he just be simple - like the rest of us? (As if the rest of us are simple!) We sailed away from it, from all the complication - maybe in the hope that we'd have time to think it through. Who *is* he?

But yeah, pretty much like Jonah fleeing God in the real world, jumping in a boat, so we end up in a boat, sailing away from some great mystery about who God is and what it all means. And just like always, no escape boat sails smoothly, but into a storm. Suddenly everything's an emergency and we're all going to die. He says to us "It is I; don't be afraid".

The minister says "This is the gospel of Christ", and the people reply "Praise to Christ, the Word".

-ooOoo-

Those were the promised eight reflections on eight characters from John 6. Also promised was the proclamation of the One who brought the eight characters together.

So hear this, you people of God:

While I cannot tell you how nothing manages to feed many, and while I cannot tell you how a Christ may walk on water, yet I can tell you, through Christ, that God feeds the people, even when there is no food. God raises from among us what is needed, so that no one need be starving. God takes boys from their surprise about having little, and makes them main characters in stories of plenty. God calls us to consider what left-overs mean in a world of on-going need. God continues to question us, as Jesus questioned Philip, about the role we might play in the world being blessed. God disturbs our thoughts about proper expectations for our world, by walking on the water and saying "It is I; don't be afraid".

As ever, we keep a moment of quiet.

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