

## **Sunday 2 August 2020**

### **Call to Worship**

People of God, let your faces shine with the joy of a new day; for in our faces the light of God's love shines forth!

People of God, lay the struggles of the week aside, but do not deny them; for it can be through our struggles that God is revealed to us most deeply.

People of God, let us join together in worship; for it is in our worship that God can know our hearts and minds.

People of God, let us raise our voices in word and prayer; for it is through our voices that the song of God is heard.

### **Opening Prayer**

Lord, we long to be in relationship with one another, with our world, with you and all that exists. We sense our very humanity depends on the depth of these relationships. Yet too often we feel estranged cut off from that which is most important. Lead us to an awakening of all that might yet be possible, for us and for our world. Amen.

### **Opening words**

On this winter's morning, the first Sunday in August,  
it is a good morning to be together!

Drawn by the warmth of familiar faces,  
to the welcoming space of this sacred place.

For this is a place where truth, love, and challenge meet.

Here, in this time, we can remember the ways God has graced us:

here, we are reminded God is with us, always!

For we have gathered here in community, in company with each other, in company with God.

There is a safe place for each of us.

In our gathering, let us be open to new understandings,  
reassurance and hope. Amen.

### **This Week's Readings**

Matthew 14: 13-21

Romans 9:1-5

Psalm 17:1-7, 15

## Prayer of Confession

Your generosity is extravagant, Jesus;  
your grace and mercy so freely given,  
your love and presence so readily available,  
your Spirit and strength so reliable.  
We are so grateful for all of these blessings that we enjoy,  
and for the goodness they bring into our lives;  
we praise you for your always coming Kingdom,  
and the abundant life it offers.  
But, Jesus, we are also fearful,  
that your gifts may not be enough,  
that things may change  
and we may find ourselves in need,  
and so we hoard your goodness,  
and separate ourselves from others.

*A time of silence to reflect upon these words for ourselves*

Forgive us for our little faith,  
and our selfish grasping;  
forgive us for our failure to understand  
that your blessings are always meant to be shared;  
teach us to stay always awake to your coming,  
and always ready to invite others in  
to the blessings you so freely share with us.  
In Jesus' name. Amen

## Message **Bring It to Jesus (Matthew 14: 13-21)**

Today's very familiar reading from Matthew, teaches us how to bring the impossible situations of life to the One for whom nothing is impossible.

It's the story of something that happened immediately after our Lord received the news of the death of John the Baptist at the hands of King Herod Antipas. Herod, the ruler of the district of Galilee, had executed John because John had pointed out the king's sin. The disciples of John had come to Jesus and reported the news to him—the news not only of Herod's murder of John, but also of Herod's fearful attitude toward Jesus as well.

And from this point on in Matthew's Gospel, we see Jesus' earthly ministry becoming less and less public; as the personal training of His disciples receives more and more of His attention.

*When Jesus heard it, He departed from there by boat to a deserted place by Himself. But when the multitudes heard it, they followed Him on foot from the cities. And when Jesus went out, He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them and healed their sick (Matthew 14:13-14).*

What happens next is one of the most notable stories in the earthly ministry of Jesus. It is so important, in fact, that it's one of the few stories that is told in all four gospel accounts.

The Holy Spirit moved upon each of the Gospel writers—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—to tell this story, each in his own way, each recording different elements and details. And yet they all report that the same basic events happened. It is reported to us as a historic event. Jesus truly did feed a large multitude of people with a few loaves of bread and a few small fish.

But why was it so important for us to read and believe this story, that the Holy Spirit moved each of the writers to include it?

Could it be that the Holy Spirit has preserved this story for us, so that we will learn to respond to impossible situations of life, by trusting in Jesus; “the things which are impossible with men are possible with God” (Luke 18:27).

Jesus says, “Bring them here to Me”. He doesn't give us a magic formula to solve our problems on our own. He gives us Himself; and invites us to cast our cares on Him.

As you listened to the passage, did you pick up on the disciples' despair over the impossibility of their situation? They were in a remote area, night was falling, there were five-thousand men, and women and children needing to be fed. And all they had was five loaves and two fish! It simply couldn't be done.

What this passage teaches us is ‘Don't despair over the seemingly impossible’.

Jesus knew the impossibility of the situation. And he wasn't caught off-guard with the tremendous need of the multitudes before Him.

*Then Jesus lifted up His eyes and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?” But this Jesus said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do. Philip answered Him, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little.” One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, “There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?” (John 6:5-9).*

Think about the ways the disciples “despaired” over the seeming impossibility of what faced them. They despaired over their financial situation; it would take more than “two hundred denarii”—about eight months wages—to feed such a crowd. And there weren't enough stores or markets to buy what they needed. They despaired over what they did have too, just a small boy's lunch. They even despaired over the humble nature of what little they had. ‘it was five ‘barley’ loaves and two ‘small’ fish, much like a sardine. Very poor offerings indeed!

The disciples clearly didn't want anything to do with this problem. And who could have blamed them? The situation was humanly impossible; they couldn't have even begun to accomplish what Jesus was proposing.

But there is an additional detail from John's gospel which is important. When Jesus turned to Philip and asked where they could buy bread to feed all those people, John added that **“this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do”**.

When we face a challenge that is bigger than we have the resources to accomplish—and when we simply don't know what we are going to do—remember that Jesus has freely permitted that challenge to fall upon us, and He already knows what He is going to do. He is testing us to see whether or not we will trust Him.

Knowing this, there is no need for us to despair.

Another lesson we can take from this passage is, make sure that you are concerned with Jesus' concerns. The greatest challenge we face in a seemingly impossible situation is, whether or not we will be conformed to the heart of Christ in it. God places us in seemingly impossible situations, but He's not concerned so much about changing the situation as He is about changing us.

What a difference it would be if, in the midst of a seemingly impossible situation—rather than panicking and saying, “Oh Lord! What are we going to do?”—we instead had the spiritual maturity to turn to our Lord in prayer and say, “Dear Lord; please teach me what Your concern is in all this. Help me to see what You see in it. What do you care about in this situation? What do You want to have happen? What do You long for? Who is it that's burdening Your heart right now, Lord; and what do You want to see happening in their lives? How can I glorify You in this situation? Show me where Your heart is in all this; and help me to conform my heart to Your concerns and Your wishes. Make my heart like Your own in all this.”

Bring what you have to Jesus.

When the disciples told Jesus ‘to send the people away, we can't feed them with the small portion of food we have’, Jesus gave them the only solution they needed. He said, “Bring them to me”. And what happened after they did so.

Jesus took that little boy's lunch and multiplied it into a meal for tens of thousands of people. He satisfied the hunger of the crowd and even provided twelve baskets-full of leftovers. None of this would have happened if the disciples had simply taken the little boy's lunch and tried to share it amongst the people; the impact of those five loaves and two fish would have been next to nothing! The miracle of the feeding of the multitude happened *only* because they brought the little they had to Jesus.

Problems are never a problem for Jesus Christ. The only thing that's important is what you and I do with those problems; and the only right thing to do with them, is to bring them to Jesus. And any problem that makes us that dependent upon Jesus is a wonderful gift from God.

Lastly, wait for Jesus' timing. When Jesus was handed the small lunch, He didn't simply wave His hand over it all and turn it into a giant banquet, immediately and dramatically. Instead, He seemed to go through a process that took time, and that involved obedience to Him. First, He had the multitudes sit down in organised groups, in hundreds and fifties before He fed them. Perhaps He wanted them to be able to enjoy fellowship as they ate; and to be able to talk together about what they were about to see Him do.

He took the time to give thanks to God and to acknowledge Him for His provision—even if that provision seemed small and insignificant in human eyes. He took the time to place the worship of His Father over the urgency of the need.

This should remind us.... that once we bring our resources to Jesus, we must wait on His timing. Things might happen immediately after we turn things over to Him; or they might not. They might be solved by Him the way we expect; or they might not. It's all up to Him. That's a tremendous test—to wait on Jesus after we have brought our problem to Him.

*Psalm 37:5 promises, "Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass."*

Repent of all despair, bring what you have to Jesus and then, trusting in Him, wait on his perfect timing. Bring the impossible to Jesus, for nothing is impossible for Him.

## **Offering**

Generous God, we rejoice in your many gifts to us. Help us to share your generosity, with those suffering hardships, those in poor health, those poor in friendship and family and those who struggle to believe. We ask you to bless and use these gifts, in the name of Jesus, who blessed the poor and said, "theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven". Amen

## **Announcements**

### **Prayers of the People -The World Vision Prayer Chain**

Almighty God, in times of fear and uncertainty we turn to you, as we do in times of joy and celebration. We know that everything is in Your sovereign control. We ask that You keep this new coronavirus from continuing to spread.

We pray you will give government officials the ability to safely handle people arriving from other countries. Help people decide to stay home instead of traveling or going out needlessly. Holy Spirit, remind people to wash their hands properly. And while it may be heartbreaking, comfort families as they decide to keep their distance from elderly or other high-risk family members.

We pray for people who are infected with the virus or facing quarantine. Jesus, during Your ministry on Earth You showed Your power and caring by healing people of all ages and stations of life from physical, mental, and spiritual ailments. Be present now to people who need Your loving touch. May they feel Your power of healing through the care of doctors and nurses.

Take away the fear, anxiety, and feelings of isolation from people receiving treatment or under quarantine. Give them a sense of purpose in pursuing health and protecting others from exposure to the disease. Protect their families and friends and bring peace to all who love them.

We pray for leaders responsible for making decisions about the new coronavirus.

Father, we seek Your wisdom daily. Be with people making decisions that affect the lives and futures of our families, communities, countries, and the wider world. We pray that they communicate clearly, truthfully, and calmly — with each other and with the public — and that their messages are received and heeded. May truth and empathy be the touchstones of people setting policies for our protection.

We pray for medical professionals, caregivers, and researchers. God, as more people get sick, healthcare workers and first responders are working longer hours with fewer supplies and with more risk to themselves. Renew their energy and sustain them on long shifts. Bring Your protection upon them as they work with patients.

Inspire and invigorate the research doctors developing better tests to diagnose the virus, create vaccines to prevent it, and identify protocols to eliminate the disease's spread.

We pray for protection for people at higher risk of developing the disease. Lord, we lift to You our concern for people who are more likely than others to become severely ill; the elderly and people with chronic health conditions. Protect them from harm and be their comfort in this time of uncertainty and, for many, preventive isolation from loved ones.

We pray for families adjusting to new ways of life. Holy Spirit, as families adjust to everyone being home as businesses and schools close, we ask that You guide people in their new realities. Give spouses grace for each other. Prompt worn-out parents to speak words of kindness and encouragement to their children. Help children find creative ways to experience the beauty of all You have created and continue learning.

We pray for business owners and families facing financial stress. Jesus, we thank You for Your faithfulness in how you have guided and equipped people in their jobs and have provided in the past. It can be scary and overwhelming not knowing how bills and obligations will be met or to not be able to provide for families. As people feel financial strain during the uncertainty, bring them comfort and peace, reminding them that You are there for them. Provide for them in their times of need.

We pray for grocery store workers and delivery drivers. Lord, we are so grateful for all the people who continue to work each day so that people are able to eat. We ask that You bless and protect them as they serve. Give them grace to handle disgruntled customers during supplies shortages. Keep their bodies healthy as they unload and stock boxes of supplies. Keep their cars and trucks running smoothly as they deliver needed supplies and food people have ordered online. And please protect them all from contracting the new coronavirus.

We ask these things in Jesus name. Amen

## **Hymn: Faith Has Set Us On A Journey**

Faith has set us on a journey  
past the landmarks that we know,  
taking risks with no insurance  
but the Word that tells us "Go!"

Friend or job or home or loved one  
we may need to leave behind,  
outworn truths and ways of thinking,  
baggage to the past consigned.

Some are swags of easy conscience  
who with others hitch a ride,  
some are tourist-package Christians,  
dollar-safe, with Book and guide.

There are others on this journey –  
those who long and pray and search,  
heave the stones to free the structures,  
love the Christ and leave the Church.

We are this unlikely people  
in the Body knit as one,  
company of clowns and cripples –  
some are wise and some can run.

Prophets are our travel agents,  
gospel-makers lay this road:  
to the place of peace and promise  
faith will take us into God.

## **Benediction**

God's peace: carry, keep and hold you.  
God's love: nourish, bless and enfold you.  
God's spirit: inspire, lift and mold you.  
Amen.