

Contexts

John's Gospel

- **Structure of John's Gospel**

**1:1-18: Prologue** – An introduction to and summary of the career of the incarnate Word.

**1:19-12:50: Part One: The Book of Signs:** the Word reveals himself to the world and to his own, but they do not accept him.

**13:1-20:31: Part Two: The Book of Glory:** To those who accept him, the Word shows his glory by returning to the Father in death, resurrection and ascension. Fully glorified, he communicates the Spirit of life.

**21:1-25: Epilogue:** Galilean resurrection appearances and second conclusion.

- It is the only Gospel to call Jesus "God".
- Purpose of Gospel is so that those who follow Jesus might have the kind of faith that would give them eternal life, namely, the faith that Jesus was God's only Son, possessing God's own life and had come into the world from above that people might be given that life (and thus be begotten by God) and become God's children. (Raymond Brown SS)

John 6:1-15 – things to notice

- Last Sunday's Gospel reading acts as a kind of bridge to this Sunday's Gospel from John. Last Sunday Jesus, moved by compassion, fed the anxious crowd with his teaching. This Sunday he feeds them with bread and fish.
- This Sunday we begin a 5 week meditation (retreat) drawing from Chapter 6 of John's Gospel – the Bread of Life passages. The reason for the change of Gospel from Mark to John is simple – Mark's Gospel is the shortest Gospel and there's not enough of it to last the whole of Ordinary Time. The designers of the Lectionary chose the 'Bread of Life' passages from John's Gospel to fill the gap.
- Each Gospel over the 5 weeks looks at Jesus as the Bread of Life from various dimensions. It would be a mistake to think that this is all about the Eucharistic Presence of Jesus in the Bread and Wine at mass. That is certainly one dimension, but not the only one offered to us over the 5 weeks.
- Note: the feeding of the 5,000 is the ONLY miracle story recounted in all four Gospels.
- Jesus goes off the other side of the Sea of Galilee – same place where Jesus went in last week's Gospel.
- This time the crowd follows him, rather than is waiting for him when he and the apostles arrive.
- They are there because they are impressed by the 'signs he gave by curing the sick'. So, not the same kind of desperation as we saw last week.
- John tells us it is near to Passover time. Why? Perhaps to build a relationship between the Passover meal and the feeding of the 5,000? Perhaps as a reminder of the Exodus?
- Jesus looks up and seeing the approaching crowd. His first thought is about how to feed them(!)
- Notice that it is Jesus (not the apostles as in Matthew, Mark & Luke) who takes the initiative here.
- 'Where can we buy some bread...?' – a test of Philip's faith but Philip doesn't see it and responds with a comment about the amount of money needed.
- The small boy with 5 loaves and 2 fish – the detailing of the number serves to highlight the insignificant (and insufficient) amount of food for so many people.

- The 5,000 men – doesn't mean that there were only men present. If women and children are also present then the figure could be 20-30,000 people! No one would have counted the number present – most probably the figure is given just to indicate a 'huge' crowd.
- Notice that Jesus takes and uses what is already there. He does not magically produce a new source of food.
- Jesus give thanks – traditional blessing before meals, but also has Eucharistic overtones.
- Notice that Jesus himself (not the disciples) gives out the fish and the bread.
- The leftovers are collected – 12 hampers, a large amount is left over demonstrating the overwhelming generosity of God's actions in Jesus. Almost always, more than enough is given in various actions done by Jesus.
- Notice that the disciples collect the left-overs. The food is entrusted to them.
- The peoples' response: they correctly recognise who Jesus is (the long-awaited Prophet) but misunderstand Jesus' true mission as messiah rather than political liberator. In John, Jesus' mission is finally revealed at his trial before Pilate.
- The people want Jesus to be king and continue to provide for them – that is, to be an unending provider of food.
- Jesus escapes (this time he outfoxes the crowd!!).

The Liturgical Context – why does the church choose this passage to reflect on this Sunday?

In the first from the Second Book of Kings contains another story of miraculous feeding which parallels the Gospel story.

Again this Sunday, the Gospel shows Jesus as a true shepherd whose heart is moved by the need of the people. Feeding the heart with the word is followed by feeding the body with real food.

Mahatma Gandhi quotes:

'To a hungry man, a piece of bread is the face of God.'

'There are people in the world so hungry that God cannot appear to them except in the form of bread.'

Reflection

Unusually, our reading of St Mark's Gospel will be interrupted for the next five weeks during which we will read the 'Bread of Life' passages from Chapter 6 of St John's Gospel. These passages form a kind of meditation about who Jesus is and what is happening when we gather for Eucharist - we are being nourished by Jesus in Word and Sacrament, and we are being sent to feed and nourish one another.

In last Sunday's Gospel, Jesus fed the crowd, hungering for the Word of God, with his teaching. This week, Jesus also feeds the crowd with bread and fish. Once again, Jesus is deeply conscious of the human needs of others. Despite there being so many, not only are all fed, but there is food left over. In the story there is a sense of super-abundance.

When God answers needs and provides for people there is never just enough; there is always more than enough.

Seeing what Jesus had done, the people think they know who Jesus is ("the prophet who is to come into the world") and what his role should be (a king who will provide anything

they want). But they have the wrong idea about Jesus' kingship. He isn't a national liberator, a political leader or a magician. So Jesus escapes into the hills by himself.

In next Sunday's Gospel Jesus will explain what this sign of feeding the multitude is really about.

As we begin this meditation on Jesus, the Bread of Life, our thoughts also turn to how we can be living bread for each other; how we can feed and nourish with the kinds of bread that do not perish: truth, justice, love, kindness, compassion, honesty, integrity, faith, hope and forgiveness.

What words can we speak, what actions can we do that not only feed bodies, but which also feed hearts hungry for comfort, hope, forgiveness, justice, mercy, acceptance and love? How can we be the 'bread of God' in our world today?

The 'food' is entrusted to us. We are fed that we might feed.