

**Collect, Readings and Sermon for Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> July 2021**  
**The Eighth Sunday after Trinity**

**Collect**

Lord God,  
your Son left the riches of heaven  
and became poor for our sake:  
when we prosper save us from pride,  
when we are needy save us from despair,  
that we may trust in you alone;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

**Ephesians 3:14-end**

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

**John 6:1-21**

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming towards him, Jesus said to Philip, 'Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?' He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, 'Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.' One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, 'There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?' Jesus said, 'Make the people sit down.' Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, 'Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.' So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, 'This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.'

When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, got into a boat, and started across the lake to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The lake became rough because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the lake and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. But he said to them, 'It is I; do not be afraid.' Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land towards which they were going.

## Sermon

A few weeks ago I attended a Study Day on John's gospel. The speaker was Professor David Ford, a Cambridge theologian, whose commentary on John's gospel is due out in December. Ford acknowledged that most of his books take him a long time to write – he has been working on this one for the last twenty years. What that means, though, is that he is completely steeped in the gospel. As a Greek scholar, he understands the linguistic nuances, and as a theologian he recognises the way the writer of John's gospel makes frequent connections to the Hebrew scriptures. David Ford has chosen an artwork entitled "The Deeper you go" as the cover for his book, and it was clear that, having spent twenty years reading and re-reading John's gospel, he continues to find greater and greater depth.

Ford identifies three key questions which form a thread through John's gospel:

1. Who is Jesus?
2. What are we seeking?
3. Where do we make our home?

It probably doesn't come as much of a surprise to hear that the question of Jesus's identity – that question "who is Jesus?" - is central to John's gospel – as it is in certain ways to all of the gospels. Just think of how John's gospel begins: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." From the outset we are introduced to Jesus as God's eternal Word, present from the beginning of creation. It is fair to say that as Christians we can risk becoming distracted by questions about how we should behave. Yet in John's gospel we are accompanied by a Jesus who wants us to come to know him. Who keeps on telling us who he is – just think of those "I am" statements – "I am the way, and the truth and the life"; "I am the resurrection and the life" and so on. Scholars will often see the first twelve chapters of John as the book of signs, with each of those signs telling us more about who Jesus is.

That second question – what are we seeking? – is equally important. This is a question about our desires – where we hear Jesus in John's gospel asking "what are you seeking" or "what are you looking for", the Greek word is really about our desires. While the synoptic gospels – Matthew, Mark and Luke – tend to focus on the Kingdom of Heaven, John places a strong emphasis on life. To be clear, this isn't because he thought that the Kingdom of Heaven was unimportant. Rather, he assumed that his readers would have access to the other gospels, so he sought to add to them, rather than covering the same ground.

And if John speaks a lot about life, it is a life that is full of abundance – abundant wine at the wedding; abundant water at the well; abundant bread for the 5000. As Jesus says, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." So if our faith is in some ways about the education of our desires; about seeking what Jesus sought; about desiring what he desired; that is done in the context of abundant love.

The word "as" is particularly important in John's gospel. Think of those passages in which Jesus speaks of us having the same kind of relationship with God the Father as Jesus himself has. And right at the end of the gospel, following the resurrection, Jesus appears to his disciples and says: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." We are called to live as Jesus lived. And in order to discover how

to do that, we need to return to the beginning of the gospel and remind ourselves how Jesus lived; what he was seeking; what he desired.

The final question about where we make our home is a question of abiding. It's a word that comes up time and again in John's gospel, as people ask where Jesus is staying, and when Jesus is speaking about being the true vine and says: "Abide in me as I abide in you." Do you recall the way in which John's gospel refers to "the disciple Jesus loved" – we tend to assume that is the John who wrote the gospel. During the Last Supper, he is to be found resting against Jesus. When we think about where we make our home, there is a very real sense in this gospel that we are being invited to rest against Jesus, just like John at the Last Supper.

I wonder what it is that this morning's gospel reading has to say about these three key questions. If we begin with the question about who Jesus is, the first thing to notice is that this reading falls right in the middle of the "book of signs" – the first twelve chapters of John's gospel. So in terms of those signs which tell us about Jesus, this is probably quite important. So what do we come to understand about who Jesus is?

Do you notice where John sets the feeding of the five thousand? Up a hill, in the presence of the disciples, with an important religious festival approaching. Mountains are where we tend to encounter God, which may tell us something about who Jesus is. And when we consider his nature, we discover that he wants to nourish people; that he does so from very meagre means – and in fact barley loaves would have been eaten by the very poorest. Jesus provides abundantly, and everyone is fed until they are satisfied. We discover, too, that Jesus is not interested in being a King in worldly terms. And, when he walks on water, that he is seeking to cast out our fear.

Turning to what we are looking for, perhaps we need to recognise our need to be fed. To understand where true nourishment comes from – that even the most basic of ingredients can provide more than enough to meet our need. It is Jesus himself who takes the bread, gives thanks, breaks it, and distributes it. Our desires need to rest with him – and if our calling is to be sent as he was sent, we also need to emulate him, in feeding the hungry and seeking to cast out fear. You will know for yourself where those opportunities arise in your daily life, perhaps when you decide to buy something for the Foodbank, or spend time with someone who is struggling – or indeed admit your own struggles and thereby enable others to realise that sometimes it's ok not to be ok. And as we live out this calling day by day, we will come to truly rest with Jesus, finding our home in him, a home of abundant life where we need never be afraid.

Amen