

## **Giving away our lunch – Matthew 14:13-21**

### **23 January 2011 at 10am**

#### **Introduction**

Good morning everyone

In our journey through Matthew we've reached chapter 14 and one of the best known of all Jesus' miracles – the feeding of the 5000. Apart from the resurrection it's the only miracle that's covered in all four gospels

It's a wonderful story that excites our imagination.

It invites us to imagine what it would have been like to be out there with Jesus in that wilderness and to experience his power and authority at first hand.

The feeding of the 5000 is a really straightforward story. There's no heavy theology to unpack here. Just a simple but very important story of a 'day in the life' of Jesus

So I want to do two things. Firstly I want to walk through what actually happened. Then secondly I want to talk about the implications for us at Southover. Got that? Firstly run through the story; secondly see what it means for us here at Southover. Simple!

It would be really helpful if you could please have your pew Bibles open on page 981

#### **The story**

So let's have a look at the story itself.

Now it's called the feeding of the 5000 for good reason. It's the number given in the text. But that's only the number of men as verse 21 specifically states. So unless the crowd only included men, which seems pretty unlikely, we're talking here about a much larger group of people – maybe upwards of 15,000 people.

So, 15,000 people, about the population of Lewes, descend on Jesus and his disciples, just as they're seeking some peace and quiet to reflect on what the death of John the Baptist might mean.

*I don't know about you, but I'd feel pretty fed up if that happened. I love you all, of course, but after a busy Sunday, I love my Monday's off too! So, if tomorrow I decide to go for a quiet walk on the Downs with Fiona, I don't want to see you all following me!..... (It's a very unlikely scenario I admit)*

But fortunately for that crowd, Jesus isn't like me! In verse 14 we read that when Jesus "saw [the] large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick." Despite his own needs, Jesus puts the needs of others first as he always did. He had compassion on them and spent most of the day healing and teaching the crowd.

So, we have a crowd the size of Lewes, on a spontaneous day out with Jesus. They've come out because they like his teaching and because they like his miracles. Actually they really

like his miracles and they don't want to risk missing the experience of a life-time with this extraordinary man.

If something special's going to happen – if some amazing miracle's going to take place – they want to make absolutely sure that they're there to see it.

At some point the disciples start thinking of practicalities like food.

Maybe their own stomachs began to rumble.

Maybe some of the crowd have made some comments, I don't know.

Anyway the disciples start asking Jesus, "Look we've got all these people. They're all hungry. What are we going to do?"

Now my guess is that there were some people there that had brought a packed lunch along with them. Maybe they were super-organised, or perhaps they already had plans to go out somewhere else and had decided to join in the pursuit of Jesus.

Anyway at this point these people are probably sitting down eating their own lunch.

But there was this one little boy – we know it was a boy from John's Gospel – there was this one little boy who was there, and I don't know exactly what his intentions were, but he's willing to take his lunch and to give it to Jesus.

I don't know if he was assuming that maybe somebody else needed it more than him and he was willing to share.

I don't know if maybe he was expecting Jesus to do a miracle, or maybe he just thought that Jesus, in addition to everyone else, was also hungry and maybe he just wanted to help feed Jesus because he was concerned about him having a meal.

I don't know.

Whatever his reasons were, he offered his lunch to Jesus.

So, in this wonderful story we've got a number of characters.

We've got the huge crowd who are going to get fed.

We've got the disciples who are sort of standing by wondering what to do

We've got the little boy who's given Jesus his lunch.

And we've got Jesus who's going to multiply this little lunch of loaves and fishes and miraculously feed the crowd.

So, a simple story with a simple message to us this morning:

And it's this: Follow the example of that boy and give away your lunch to Jesus

That's the message of the feeding of the 5000. It's as simple as that!

You see most of us spend our time eating our own lunch, and not sharing it with those who are in need. And, as a result, we fail to see the power and grace of God demonstrated in our lives because we've never given God anything that he could work with, and multiply, and do something wonderful with.

*When I hold a cricket bat in my hands, it's just a cricket bat. But when you place a cricket bat in Alistair Cook's hands you win the Ashes.*

*If you put a paintbrush in my hands, it's just a paintbrush. But put a paintbrush in Picasso's hands and you get priceless works of art.*

*The point is this: if you put what you have into the right hands, you'll get amazing results.*

If we put our lunches, our limited resources, into the hands of Jesus Christ, he can and will do amazing things with them.

The message of the feeding of the 5000 is simple: having seen the example of the little boy we're to go and do likewise"

### **Southover**

So, we've looked at the story and we've seen what its message is. Now I want us to think through what it really means for us here at Southover.

What does giving away our lunch, actually mean?

Now some of you, many of you, have been extraordinarily generous with your giving recently and I don't want what I'm going to say, to be a burden to you.

If you've carefully and prayerfully considered your giving, in all its forms, and you're comfortable with what you're currently giving, that's great. You should relax.

If you've had the privilege of seeing God take your contributions – financial, time, prayer, service, care, concern, love, teaching; whatever it is – and multiply it, this morning should be a time of celebration – not guilt.

You should just rejoice and thank God for how amazingly gracious and powerful he is.

The point is that one of the main ways that God works, is through his people. At Southover this means and you and I are supposed to be like this little boy – conduits through which God works in this world.

How are people going to get fed?

How are people going to be loved?

How are people going to be taught?

How are they going to be counselled?

How are they going to be healed?

How are these things going to happen?

It's supposed to happen through God's people. It's through us.

We're the means by which God mostly chooses to do his work in the world.

Now some of us will say, "Well as soon as I get this much money, or I get this much time, or I get this much skill, or I get this much wisdom, then I'm going to give God a really big lunch." And that's okay. That's okay.

But what the little boy does is better. He just walks up and says "Do know what? My lunch is little but my God is big. God will more than make up the difference." And he gives away his lunch – possibly his only food for the day.

But one thing we're reminded in this story is this: God is no one's debtor. That little boy not only had lunch that day but, along with everyone else, he had a real feast! Look at verse 20: *"They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over."*

Jesus didn't give out some pitiful airline snack. Please don't be side-tracked by the idea that this boy's generosity suddenly inspired everyone to start sharing what they had with each other. That's a clear misreading of the gospel accounts.

Not only did everyone eat but they "were satisfied". They had their fill. And there was enough left over for each of the disciples to take a personal doggy-bag home with them! Don't kid yourself that on a spontaneous day out, enough people had thoughtfully planned ahead and packed sufficient extra to satisfy a crowd the size of Lewes!

No! It's absolutely clear that Jesus miraculously multiplied those five barley loaves and two fishes to feed the multitude. He took something that was completely inadequate and made it into something that was much more than adequate.

And if Jesus could do that with five loaves and two fishes, imagine what could he do with the resources that we currently have at Southover?

With a relatively balanced budget; with a visionary leader in Steve Daughtery; with four full-time ministers already and Helen Garratt only six months away; a new Youth Minister being searched for; and Samuel Yesashimwe, a Careforce Worker, here in 6 months we hope. With Janette Watkins, Judy Yeomans, Charlotte Homewood, John Mercer, the Church Wardens, and many, many, others giving time to the leadership of our church, we are truly blessed, by the standards of most churches.

So, what more do we need?

Well I'll tell you what more we need. We need more little boys with their lunches! Because the people I've just mentioned can't do it by themselves. Nor are they meant to.

Remember it wasn't the leadership, i.e. the disciples, who provided the lunch that fed the 15,000. It was a small boy.

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I believe that Southover is now ready. It's ready to be used by God to feed the people, not just of Southover, but of Lewes. But frankly it'll only happen if you all become small boys and give away your lunches to be multiplied by Jesus.

Can you do that?

Can you give up your lunch for Lewes? Are you willing to do that?

It's a big ask I know but it's to serve our big God who's got a big heart and big ideas for this town

When we sang earlier “This is my desire, to honour you: Lord, with all my heart I worship You..... Lord, I give You my heart, I give You my soul; I live for You alone”, what does that mean, if it doesn’t mean giving away our loaves and fishes? What does it mean?

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I want to spend the rest of my time this morning simply reminding you what happens when Southover people give away their lunches

Firstly, Church End. Up until about 15 years ago Church End was a private house. Then it came onto the market. It seemed a perfect fit with the church.

Expert advice suggested its value was between £230 to 250k. But although Southover didn’t have anything like this money, the leadership was convinced that God wanted us to buy the house.

So they offered £192k which we also didn’t have! It was accepted.

Incredibly, in only a few days a large number of the congregation each offered their lunches in the form of gifts and loans with little expectation of repayment, and the necessary money was raised.

Right now Church End is pretty well indispensable to our ministry. It’s used for many church meetings and by many groups, and links beautifully with the Chapter House. It’s difficult to imagine not having it now. And it’s all thanks to those original lunches.

Secondly, our Youth Minister post. In September 2003 the PCC decided to ask the church to support the creation of a new post of Youth Minister by raising the necessary funds.

Once again lunch boxes were raided.

Once again the Southover congregation responded magnificently and the position was funded and confirmed. Chris Steynor arrived in mid 2004.

At the time it seemed a big step of faith. But six years on and with the flourishing Youth Work we have, can you imagine not having a Youth Minister now?

But, of course it’s more than just Chris Steynor’s work. Day by day Jesus is also multiplying the work of all the volunteer youth leaders too. Every lunch given counts, big or small.

*The American artist James Whistler was never known to be shy about his talent. One day he received news that a shipment of blank canvases he had ordered had been lost in the mail. When asked if the canvases were of any great value, Whistler remarked, “Not yet, not yet.”*

Sometimes our lunches may seem small in value. But Jesus can change them into items of great value and potential. Jesus turns those fishes and loaves into human beings in the kingdom.

That’s really what it’s all about.

It’s just God’s kindness taking our contributions: time, energy, food, support, encouragement, love, prayer – whatever it is – just taking the bit that we give him (like those youth leaders) and then doing something beautiful with it.

I could go on about the example of the Chapter House or even more about our Vision Sunday last October, which increased our giving by a staggering £65k a year and secured the services of David, Helen and Chris, as well as adding a new Youth Minister to the team. Talk about people digging deep into their pockets, your pockets! Talk about supreme sacrifices being made by many of you. I'll be honest, I didn't think you would do it. But you did – praise God! And I and the rest of the Southover leadership are deeply humbled.

But do you know the most exciting thing about Vision Sunday? We haven't even begun to see the multiplier effect yet. Not even begun! All we've done so far on this one is simply to give our lunch to Jesus.

I can't wait until this time next year when we should be beginning to see some of the blessings flowing from Vision Sunday: lives being transformed; people being saved; God being glorified in Lewes.

And it'll all be because of your lunches

### **Conclusion**

So let's recap.

In the feeding of the 5000, Jesus takes the lunch offered by a little boy. He multiplies it over and over again, and feeds a crowd the size of Lewes. And at the end, there is more food left over, than there was at the beginning. Such is the power of Jesus Christ.

And that's very good news.

But it's also very challenging news

Because it puts us on the front line and asks if we're prepared to give away our lunch, so that it can be used and multiplied by Jesus. For his Father's glory.

Although many of you have already given till it hurts, I believe that there are still some of us that aren't seeing God's power and grace because we're sitting there eating our lunch.

You say, "Well why doesn't God do these things in my life?"

Well are you eating the lunch? If you haven't handed it to him, you shouldn't anticipate seeing him multiply it.

It doesn't mean that God is unwilling or unable.

It means that we're sitting there eating our lunch when we should have shared it.

And so the homework that I have for you this morning is simply this:

Start actively looking for opportunities to give away your lunch as part of your service for Jesus Christ. You'll be amazed at what happens

Imagine how much Jesus could accomplish through us if we spent just an hour each month visiting the elderly in a nearby nursing home – see Janette Watkins or David Garratt if you're interested in doing this

Imagine how much Jesus could accomplish through us if we shared our love for him via a cup of coffee with that lonely neighbour or that struggling work colleague

Imagine how many ministries we could help if we each devoted fully 10% of our personal income to Christian causes

Imagine what could be achieved through the launch of Cafélife in the town-centre. What could we do to help support this?

Imagine what might happen if every single one of us here this morning gave away our loaves and fishes for Lewes

Imagine...