

Dear Friends,

The gospel reading this week is the very well-known story of the feeding of the five thousand. It's a story that has a human element but at the same time this was clearly no ordinary meal. There have been many attempts to explain what happened on that day. Some have suggested that in fact the people had brought their own food with them but weren't prepared to share it until Jesus led by example. Others have been prepared to accept the story as it stands as a truly miraculous event or have tried to find alternative explanations. Really all this can only be speculation, we cannot be totally sure precisely what happened all those years ago.

One thing the story reminds us is that we don't know how much God will do with the little that we sometimes offer him. We are often conscious that we don't have that much we can offer to God. At times we're so busy doing other things we are only able to offer a small amount of time or energy. The truth we are reminded of here is that we do not always know what God can do with what we offer. Sometimes we feel that we are working in the dark, we don't feel that we are getting anywhere in our discipleship or service. God knows what use he is making of us, but very often we don't. In a sense it's probably as well the results of our work are often hidden, otherwise our pride could easily come into play.

In the story of the feeding of the multitude there was plenty of food to spare and that reminds us of the abundance of life in Christ. There was enough for everyone and there was still plenty to spare. The multitude were filled and were satisfied and that is what is now available to all of us. The new life fills us and satisfies us because it meets our deepest needs.

We receive our spiritual food in many ways, through prayer, reading the Bible, coming to worship, meeting together in house groups and study groups. Many of these are regular commitments, at least in normal times, because we realise their importance. Just as we become hungry if we go without eating meals, so if we go without spiritual food we become spiritually hungry. We are having to adapt to different circumstances at present and many may feel spiritually hungry given the absence of so much.

This analogy, while helpful, does have its limits. We cannot be unaware of the damage that is being caused by not eating meals. The warning signs become apparent very soon, the body can manage fasting for a day, but it's not long before the body starts to send reminders and warnings. We cannot starve ourselves without being acutely aware of the fact. When thinking in terms of spiritual hunger, though the warning signs are still present they can be ignored without too much difficulty. There is always the danger that in crowded and busy lives our growing spiritual hunger can simply be ignored. This story reminds us of the great generosity of God who gives us so much love and so much spiritual food.

Just a brief reminder that Jean Orton will soon be ordering the new Methodist Prayer Handbooks, a bargain at £4.15. Please let Jean know (258 9093) if you would like a copy.

With best wishes,

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