



Celebration worship

Open the Book 20th anniversary

By Revd Heather Whyte

John 6:1-14 VOICES

Disciple

I remember that day...

It was late in the afternoon and it had been a long day. We had climbed the mountain behind Jesus and we were not alone – there was a crowd behind us as far as the eye could see. Men, women and children, of course many of the children were at the front, they had more energy left.

Jesus led us to a pasture where we sat down and caught our breath and gazed at the sea with sun glinting off the ripples. It would have been easy to lay back and go to sleep but, as always, Jesus was speaking and anyway, the crowd were edging closer.

Suddenly Jesus asks Philip where we could buy bread for the crowd. Well I mean, we were almost at the top of the mountain so I am not sure if he meant it or was joking... but Philip had an answer, 'Six months wages wouldn't buy more than a mouthful each for a crowd this size'. And then Andrew pipes up, jokingly, and says, 'There's a boy here with five loaves and two fish!' I'm sure the jokes would've gone on but Jesus caught us all out and looking at the crowd said, 'Tell them all to sit down.' It didn't happen quickly, those at the front cottoned on but it took a while for those further back to realise what was happening. Eventually though they were all sitting, then Jesus takes the five loaves from the boy and says a prayer, then he starts to break them up and pass bits out to the crowd telling them to eat what they needed and pass it on. He did the same with the fish.

Now, I expected a riot as the food ran out; I mean five loaves amongst... well... thousands it felt like, but the passing never seemed to stop. To this day I don't know what happened but everyone was fed. Then Jesus asked us to gather up what was left... what was left from five loaves and two fish amongst thousands... but we filled twelve baskets!

When we got back to Jesus with the baskets, he didn't seem surprised but the crowd were. There was a stunned hush then everyone seemed to start talking at once. It was a miracle. A sign. Jesus was the Messiah. We sensed danger and turned to warn Jesus but he had disappeared. The crowd were disappointed but they began to disperse after that, although they were still talking about it as they left.



The boy

I remember that day...

We had gone for a picnic on the beach. It was at the foot of the mountain and suddenly these men arrived. There must have been 10 or 12 of them and they were following someone. As they passed us the leader nodded at us; then they began to climb the mountain. Next, we saw crowds of people coming and they seemed to be following the others. Dad told me to pick up the food and we joined them. We were quite near the front and as we got to the pasture at the top I saw the first group of men all sit down. Everyone began to gather around them. I wriggled my way to the front to see what was happening. The leader, the one they seemed to be following, was talking to those nearest him in the crowd. Some of the others were joining in but some were laughing together. Then one of the group pointed in my direction and said something and the others laughed louder. All except the one they seemed to be following. He just looked at me then said something to the others. Next thing, the group are moving towards the crowd and telling us to sit down but, before I could sit down, the leader came over to me and asked for the food I was carrying. I looked round trying to see Dad, I thought 'I can't just give away our food', but he was out of sight amongst the crowd. When I turned back, the man was still standing there and then, something inside me made me give him the food.

He walked away with it, then seemed to pray over it; started breaking the loaves apart and handing pieces to people around me, telling them to eat what they needed and pass on what was left. I wasn't sure what to do so I decided to try and find Dad. So I walked through the crowd and by the time I found them, the bread had almost reached them. Which was strange because I only had five loaves and I must have walked past nearly a hundred people. I ate some bread with my family then we passed it on. I hoped Dad wouldn't ask where our bread was later, I am not sure he would have believed me. I think I fell asleep after that and when I woke up, most of the crowd had disappeared and Dad said it was time to go home. It was a strange picnic.



Pharisee in the crowd

I remember that day...

As usual, a crowd was gathering around Jesus from Nazareth and his 'groupies'. It was shortly after he had healed the man by the pool. We thought we had got him that day but he talked himself out of the situation again, he certainly had a way with words. There had been rumours about miracles and there was always a crowd looking for the spectacular. On that day, Jesus and his followers headed out of town and up the mountain beside the Sea of Tiberius. As usual the crowd followed and grew as they walked. I followed too, so I could report back to the others. Perhaps this time we would catch him out.

At the top of the mountain they sat down on the pasture. Then some of them approached the crowd and asked them to sit down. In a wave of movement the crowd sat. Those at the front followed by those further back – all the way down the mountainside. I was a little way back and didn't want to be noticed so I sat down with the crowd. What was the power of this man? There was talking and laughter then suddenly I noticed those in front of me eating bread and it was being passed from hand to hand. When it was passed to me I asked where it had come from because I had not seen anyone carrying the sort of bag that would hold that much bread. No-one around me seemed to know but someone further forward said they had seen Jesus take some bread from a boy and begin handing it out. But I am sure that cannot have been correct. A little while later some fish was passed back in the same way. Everyone was in a good mood as they ate their unexpected picnic. Later, someone said everyone in the crowd was fed but I never saw any more bread passed back so that seems unlikely. Probably others shared what they had in their pockets, but the rumours started.

I remember the mood changing when others realised that here was something they could not explain. People began talking about miracles again – well I suppose it was a miracle that everyone shared what they had that day, but the suggestion seemed to be that Jesus had something to do with it. Suddenly they began talking about crowning him – it looked like there could be trouble but then someone noticed that he had disappeared. After that, the crowd began to disappear as well and I went back to tell the others what had happened. The Romans wouldn't be happy if this crowning nonsense got out of hand.



Woman at the back of the crowd

I remember that day...

What a day it was. My friend and I had joined a crowd walking towards the sea. Someone said we were following Jesus of Nazareth – I hadn't heard of him but others seemed to know who he was. When we got to the mountain all you could see was people sat all over the mountainside. We sat down on the shore, glad of the rest and started to chat in the late afternoon sun. Some of us still had our baskets that we had used for deliveries.

After a while we noticed movement in the crowd, as if something was being passed back. There was laughter and talking. Suddenly the people next to us leaned over and passed us some bread. They told us to eat what we wanted and pass the rest on. None of us had eaten for while so were glad of the offer. A while later, the same folk passed across some fish. There were not many folk behind us but we passed it on as we had been instructed.

A little later we saw some men walking through the crowd and they seemed to be collecting something. As they got near, we heard them ask if there was any bread or fish left. They already had armfuls and when they saw our baskets they asked if they could borrow them. What they had, filled twelve of our baskets. When we asked where the bread had come from so that we could say thank you, they said Jesus had got it from a boy. Well, I thought that was what they said, but how could a boy carry so much bread and fish? It didn't really make sense. Someone said it reminded them of the Passover stories of the wilderness and I suppose it was a bit like that.

We stayed by the sea for a while and as the crowds past us on their way home we caught snatches of some amazing ideas. Someone even suggested Jesus was the Messiah! Whoever he is he needs to be careful, crowds can turn nasty – I hope he has a good supply of bread!

