

Reading: Matthew 14:13-21

It's great today to welcome representatives from the local community, and from the racing industry in particular, for our annual grand national service. It's our tradition to have this service to pray for the safety of all in the industry, to bless the colours and to mark the traditional beginning of the racing season.

I did hear of a vicar who thought it would be a good idea to invest in a race horse. She cashed in her Kiwisaver. The trainers and jockeys knew this was a vicar's horse so they trained it to go on the command 'Thank God' and to stop on the command 'Amen'. The vicar thought this was great and asked if she herself could have a ride. So she gave the command and off it went. The problem was the horse got faster and faster and faster and it was approaching a cliff. She couldn't for the life of her remember the command to stop the horse but she needed to do it before they both plunged to their deaths. Just as she was about to go over the edge she remembered. "Amen" she said in a loud voice. The horse pulled up just short of certain death. With sweat pouring down her face she looked at the cliff and in a loud voice exclaimed "Thank God!"

Today as we gather we hear again that well known story that is in all of the Gospels: The Feeding of the 5000. The disciples find themselves in a deserted place with a huge crowd following Jesus. The sun is going down and they are anxious to find something for everyone to eat. They have a cunning plan - why not send them all away so they can go and buy something in nearby towns. Jesus turns it back on them. "You give them something to eat," he tells them. "But all we have," they answer "are five loaves and two fish."

Like me, you will have had that experience where what you have to offer just doesn't seem enough. The needs of those around us just seem to be overwhelming. I often get that feeling when I go to the bedside of someone who is dying. What can I bring? What can I say? The good news of today's reading is that the little that you and I have to offer is enough.

From those five loaves and two fish Jesus is able to feed the crowd.

But this seems a tall story, surely the Gospel writer had had too much communion wine to seriously believe this one!

Nobody can remember whose idea it was, but it seemed like a good idea at the time to the mostly middle class congregation of Christ the King in the middle class suburb of the Sao Paulo in the vast country of Brazil. It was coming up to Christmas and the Christians were very conscious of those that didn't have it as good as they did. Their hearts went out especially to those men, women and children who lived at the dump trying to eek out a living from what other people threw away. People like them. A whole village of these dump dwellers lived on other people's rubbish. They constantly sorted through the rubbish, selling what they could, eating what they couldn't. The authorities had tried many times to move them on but, no

sooner had they been evicted than another group moved in where the others had left.

So the well meaning Christians organised a little truck and a Christmas ham and some veggies and some fresh water. "It won't make any difference," said one of the members of the congregation. "It will make a difference to some of them," another said. "We don't have enough to feed all those mouths," another said. "It will cause a riot," another one said. "We would be better not to even try." "We have to do something," another said.

So after their Christmas day worship, they filled the little truck and off they went. It didn't take long for the word to get around the rubbish heaps. Free food. The line sure was long, but everyone got a feed and the look of gratitude on the faces of the people was priceless.

It wasn't until they were reflecting later, that the full extent of the miracle began to dawn on them. "I just kept carving that ham," said the man with the knife. "It never seemed to run out." "I just kept pouring drinks," said the drink lady. "It never seemed to run out." One man said, "I spooned out so many veggies that my arm ached." That little truckload of food had been enough.

On reflection the real miracle wasn't feeding everyone. The real miracle was the willingness to share and the attitude of love that prompted it.

Time and time again this congregation can testify to the truth of this miracle. That the little we have to share with the community is enough. We might start small and with meagre resources but God blesses our efforts.

Over twenty years ago a group of Christians met to discuss the needs of this area. I know the story well because my wife chaired the meeting. What we need they said is an ecumenical centre where people can get affordable counselling, a centre which supports the mental health and resilience of those who can least afford counselling. It seemed like a pipe dream but Petersgate was born. Today it is one of the busiest counselling centres in the South Island. Over 7000 people are given fresh hope each year. Here on this site. From the smallest of loaves and fishes the miracle of the 5000 is re-enacted in plain sight.

This, for me, is why it's so important that we restore St Peter's Church. Not because it's pretty, though it is, not because it's historical, though it is that too, not because it links us to our ancestors, though it does, not because we have more community ministries than our hall can hold, though we do, but because the church is a symbol of hope in our community.

What our church building is so are we. To answer my own question, this is what I bring to the bedside of a dying person. I bring hope, the certainty that death is not the end. This is what all of us Christians bring to our lives, to our families, and to our community. We are symbols of hope.

It was Mother Teresa who said, "We don't need to do great things, but just small things with great love."

We have enough already, we are enough already. What we offer may seem small, but in Christ it is enough.