

Reading: John 6:1-21.

The year was 1998. The Anglican church had organised what it called a Hikoi of Hope to highlight the needs of the poor. It had the wonderful slogan: “Walk for a Change.” And we did. Many thousands from all over the country descended on Wellington. It’s hard to estimate crowd numbers but it was estimated that about 5,000 people marched on the Beehive.

I’d gotten up really early that day to travel from Christchurch to get the ferry and I joined the march at lunch time. I was hungry and tired doing this church thing when, from nowhere, in the crowd a little Maori boy appeared at my elbow, “Hey mister, you on the Hikoi?” I said “Yes” because I was. “Here’s lunch.” He gave me two spaghetti sandwiches and a pottle of yoghurt. I’ve never been so grateful for lunch. I’ve often wondered what motivated that boy to give me lunch. I’ve often wondered what he’s up to now. Was it his lunch? Anyway, back to the march. They say no good comes of these things. How wrong they are. As it turned out the Cabinet had a special meeting to discuss how to respond. Ever since then Christian leaders have been invited to the Beehive every month to help the government of the day decide matters of importance.

Crowds are hard to estimate but all the Gospels agree that about 5,000 people followed Jesus that day. All the gospels agree the crowd was tired and hungry. And all the Gospels agree that the lunch of a wee boy somehow fed them all. Recounting this event was very important to the early Christians. And the symbols of fish and bread (- or was it 2 spaghetti sandwiches and a pottle of yoghurt?), can be found in the earliest Christian art in the catacombs and on early Christian graves.

I believe it is vital to understand this story. It tells us about God’s abundant generosity. There was, after all, heaps left over. It tells us about Jesus’ compassion - he is concerned that everyone is fed. It tells us about the Eucharist, how at the table all are to be fed by Jesus. It tells us about the reign of God, how in God’s kingdom all have a place and all will dine together. But most important of all, it tells us what sort of attitude, what sort of hearts we are to have as Christians.

The greatest miracle is not taking a boy’s lunch and feeding 5,000 people. The greatest miracle of all is the change of heart in the disciples. They change from having limited hearts and minds to unlimited hearts of the kingdom, hearts of love.

“This place is like a desert. Where can we find enough food?” they say. “Send them

away.” This is the voice of reason and common sense. “We only have five small loaves and two fish.” In the end, despite their reluctance, the disciples find it in their hearts to have the courage to share even though they do not know how it will work out, even though they cannot see how it could work. The kingdom attitude that this story wants to instill in our hearts is one of sharing.

Like the disciples, our world finds it hard to share. We find it hard to share. We are told that what we have is only enough for me. That we can't do everything is common sense. But something happened to the disciples that day. They got a glimpse of a different way. When we share, it is God, not us, who does the multiplying. We just have to be obedient to God's call on our lives and resources.

In fact God's love works in reverse: the more we share the more we have to share. This is because those who receive God's love want to share it with others too.

To peel back this miracle is to go to the heart of the Christian life. It is interesting that the very first thing that Jesus does before giving out the food is to give thanks. To be grateful, to give thanks is the beginning of what it means to be a Christian. In fact it is the middle and the end as well! Meister Eckhart, the great medieval mystic, said that if we say just one prayer in our whole life and that prayer is “Thank you,” it will be enough.

All the things that are of any value God has given us. What have we done to deserve to be alive, to live in this beautiful land? What have we done to deserve our families? Just the other day I said “What have I done to deserve this?” What have we done to deserve our bodies? our church family? our food? our shelter? - and these are just the tangibles of life. What about the intangibles that give life real meaning - music, books, films, sport, laughter, tears, our Saviour. All this and so much more God has given us with an open hand.

For me there can only be one response. Gratitude.

I thank God everyday for this community of St Lukes and St Peters. It enables so much wonderful ministry to take place across three centres. To take just one example. Last week I was called to bedsides of two people who were dying. One of them feared dying. I can understand that. But I was there to say it was going to be okay. When I prayed they reached out their hand and put it in mine. They knew. I can't be there without the support of all you lot. The prayers, the money, the admin, the maintenance, the worship. What you see the clergy doing is only the tip of a very active and impressive iceberg.

Today is our annual Commitment Sunday. We begin, as we should, with our ministry to serve God in the world, our families and our neighbourhood, and then we offer our

money for the work of the parish.

The same miracle Jesus did all those years ago he wants to do again. He wants to change our hearts into hearts filled with gratitude. He wants to take the small amount we can offer and He stands ready to multiply it. But as St Augustine said, “Without God we cannot. Without us God will not.” A pottle of yoghurt and two spaghetti sandwiches can make all the difference. But it starts with a heart of gratitude. That is the first miracle. When we have a heart of love in tune with God’s heart then all other miracles suddenly become possible too.