

## **Bennochy Church 5<sup>th</sup> August 2012**

You were there. You witnessed the miraculous. Like watching a well known magician, you are asking yourself, *'How did he do that?'* There were thousands there, tired and hungry; miles from nowhere and he took five loaves and two fish and fed everyone. Not only that, there were twelve baskets filled with left over's.

The next day, still wondering what actually happened and wanting more, you seek out the author of the miracle, Jesus the carpenter of Nazareth.

When you find him, you don't get to the point, you ask a meaningless question, which Jesus immediately sees through. You are there not because you understand what happened or recognise who Jesus is, you are there because you want to witness another miracle. You want to be filled with that which meets your needs. You were fed with bread and now you want more.

If we were sitting in front of Jesus right now, what is it in life we would wish him to give us? To be filled with the things of heaven or the things of earth? That is what this story is all about. In the miracle of the feeding of the

5000 and the follow up discussion with the crowd, Jesus wants us to recognise what is important for life. Is it limited, finite, earthly or that which lasts eternally?

Jesus response prompts a new question. Life is like that. Our experiences raise new questions that we reflect on and often these experiences are ones of struggle. What does this mean for how I will live out my life in the future? Where is God in all of this?

To the crowd Jesus says, you need to believe. The natural question raised in our minds might be, in what, in whom? We need more information. We need more proof. Give us another miracle. You fed thousands, we witnessed that; just like our ancestors who received manna in the desert from the hand of God. So give us another miracle that we might believe. We do that sometimes; we seek an action from God so that we might believe in him. Jacob did it, as he was running for his life from his brother Esau, he said, *'keep me safe and you will be my God'*. We might pray, *'heal me, help me and then I will believe'*. It is tempting, especially when people we love are hurting.

Jesus is raising the question of what is real. There is a comparison going on here in the minds of the crowd. They are comparing Jesus to Moses, and although the Manna in the desert was a miracle, and it sustained the people of Israel on their journey, it was not bread from heaven and it did not confer real life. The real bread, says Jesus, comes from God himself. Think of the context of what is happening in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine. The crowd see Jesus as offering not just free food, but political deliverance as Moses did, but Jesus says the reality of the spiritual life is not another sign or miracle that can be 'seen', but faith in God that is 'unseen'.

You see how Jesus is leading this conversation to a climax? We know the ending, but put yourselves in the shoes of the crowd. They want this bread that gives life, but they fail to understand what it is, or who he is. Did they think that Jesus was literally going to give them something to eat that would offer life eternal? It seems like it. *"Sir, give us this bread always."*

*"I am the bread of life"*, he says. If you are looking for the real manna, here it is! Take in these words, absorb them, and be amazed. But read on and see how the

conversation continues, the people were not convinced. They could not see beyond the obvious. They did not recognise the shift from the physical bread that they ate and were filled, to the spiritual life offered by Jesus. Blinkered to their own needs they could not comprehend what Jesus was saying.

[Video clip, *"money, money, money"* by Abba]

Here is a question for all of us. What would our Manna from heaven look like; money or power? If we were wandering through the desert of life, what is it we would actually seek from God; health, strength, love? And if all our needs were met, would we see beyond the obvious to understand and experience the words of Jesus? *"I am the bread of life; he who comes to me will never be hungry..."*

What is it we wish to experience in life? Signs or miracles from God, like Thomas experienced, that you would think makes belief easy, or hear the words of Jesus, *'how happy are those who believe without seeing me'*, and know these words to be true. Amen.