

Isaiah 55:1-5 Psalm 158: 8-9, 15-22 Romans 9:1-5 Matthew 14:13-21

Just over a month ago I went to England for a week to see my family. It rained almost every day. But now it is the hottest temperature than ever before. The reading from the prophet Isaiah has something for this weather. **It is an invitation to the thirsty.** But it is far more than that, we are offered a new way of living that was first offered to the Jewish people and then to the whole world. This is the love of God to us all.

The second reading from Romans is **another example of love in action.** Also Romans 12 reminds us not to simply talk about it, but to put it into action. It lists about 40 different examples for us to put into practice, or to avoid. The speed and large number of active ideas presented by St Paul means that we have next to no chance of learning anything. So take a moment to find two things you are really good at and one that needs to change. (...)

Now let us join the Feeding of the Five Thousand.

John the Baptist was Jesus' relative, his forerunner, and the one who baptised him. According to the New Testament, they were cousins (their mothers, Elizabeth and Mary, were related), and John was born about six months before Jesus. Jesus has just heard the sad news that John the Baptist has been killed by Herod, the ruler of the country. He has lost him in a way which must have warned Jesus of what lay ahead for him too. Yet when he slips away to be quiet and alone, the crowds discover his sorrow and throng all around him. His reaction is not anger or frustration, but compassion. He translates his sorrow over John, and perhaps over himself, into sorrow for them and their needs.

Let us imagine that day, not as one of the disciples, not as a leader, just someone who is interested in Jesus. What might be the best for him? Wouldn't it be better for the crowd to go home, so that they could get something to eat rather than all getting hungry, miles away from anywhere?

Jesus is always delighted when those around him come up with ideas which show that they're thinking of the needs of others. But often what he has to do is take these ideas and do something startling with them. If you really care for them, he says, what don't you give them something to eat?

This is perhaps the typical note of vocation. Our small idea of how to care for people gets bounced back at us with what seems a huge and impossible proposal. You protest. I can't do it! I haven't got the time. I haven't got the energy. I haven't got the ability. All I have is ... and so on. But then someone has a good idea, we could share our food.

Jesus takes this pitifully small amount of food and prays over it. He thanks God for it. He breaks it and gives it to you and others, and they give it to one person after another, without knowing what's happening, or how.

And gives it back to you. Think through how it's happened. **Being close to Jesus has turned into the thought of service;** Jesus takes the thought, turns it inside out, and gives it back to you as a challenge. You then offer what you have got, knowing it's not enough, and the same thing happens. He takes it and blesses and breaks it, and gives it to you – and your job now is to give it to everybody else.

That is how it works whenever someone is close enough to Jesus to catch a glimpse of what he's doing and how they could help. We blunder in our ideas. We offer, without knowing, what little we have. Jesus takes ideas, loaves and fishes, money and a sense of humour, time, energy, talents, love and artistic gifts, skill with words, quickness of eye or fingers, whatever we have to offer. He holds them before his Father with prayer and blessing. Then breaking them so that they are ready for use, he gives them back to us to give to those who need them.

And now they are both ours and not ours. They are both what we had in mind and not what we had in mind. Something greater and different, more powerful and mysterious, yet also our own.

It is part of genuine Christian service, at whatever level, that we look on in amazement to see what God has done with the bits and pieces we dug out of our limited resources to offer to him.