

John 6:1-21; Ephesians 3:14-21

*“I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”*

When I was a small child, there were certain things that seemed like great abundance. Having a whole pack of chips to myself rather than having to share it among siblings. Being allowed chocolate for breakfast when on vacation. A 10 pound note in a birthday card. The sack of presents from my granny at Christmas that was the same size as me.

But as I got older, these things became less thrilling (apart from the chocolate for breakfast). With time, my perspective changed, and it took a bit more for me to feel a sense of abundance. And I think this holds true for most things in life. What might feel like great riches to one person is just usual and taken for granted by another. Or what is perceived as a lack or shortcoming to one might seem strangely unappreciative to someone else.

In the story of the feeding of the five thousand, that one small lunch of bread and fish probably seemed perfectly adequate to its packer, who had no idea it would be asked to stretch so far. But when lunch time arrives it's like the worst kind of pot luck, where 99% of people have failed to show up with anything. But there is this one meal. There is abundance, if seen in the right way. Transformative abundance, in the hands of Jesus. In the hands of Jesus, the smallest, most overlooked thing can be brought into a glorious wealth.

Now I wonder, if you were given one wish for the church, what you might imagine to ask for. If we had a genie in a bottle who specialised in spiritual wishes, what would you come up with? I bet between all of us there are some astonishing things we could dream of. But Paul, in the beautiful prayer of our Ephesians reading, assures us that God is still bigger, still more marvellous, still more able to achieve, than anything we can imagine.

And thank goodness for that! Because the truth is that we are sometimes overwhelmed with what we think we lack.

It is true, it's no secret that the church is struggling in some ways. Attendance is dropping, finances are less predictable, and society is changing in the values and priorities people place on religion. It can be easy to feel alarmed, or to view the glory days as being behind us. "Church used to be full! Families used to come every week! People used to gather in great numbers but all bring their own plentiful packed lunch! Woe woe!" we cry, wringing our hands.

Perhaps we feel like Andrew, looking around, weighing our time, talents and treasures in the face of change, and asking, 'what are they among so many, among so much need?'

Oh, but you of little faith, as Jesus might say, your perspective is all wrong. For when has God ever been stopped by our own idea of what is enough? God wouldn't be God if the work of the kingdom could only happen when the economy was booming and revival was sweeping the nation. Instead God is always doing the unexpected, creating abundance out of anything we've got to give.

And we have so much to give! We have so many riches we forget to even see them. We just need to have the

right perspective. If you look around this church this morning, what do you see? Do you see that not every seat is filled? Or do you see the richness of variety in age, professions, worldviews, spiritual gifts, family structure, skills and passions? Do you see the dedicated prayer lives, the deep faith, the love that binds us together? Do you see the 5 loaves and 2 small fish?...

The question is, what is your perspective? And what is your dream? Do you believe that God, by the power at work within us, is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine?

There is sometimes a sense of 'it used to be better' whispering that the church is doomed. There may even be some ways in which this is true. It is possible that Holy Comforter fades away. It is possible that the Episcopal Church ceases to be an active denomination. It is possible that the world coming over the horizon is unrecognisable to us today.

But I want to offer you the greatest encouragement. Even when it feels like we only have crumbs to feed a multitude, we are on a vibrant path where Jesus walks before us with the assurance, 'it is I, do not be afraid'.

Because what will never stop is there being people who love God. What will never cease is the praising of God's glory. What will never die away is the gospel, that Jesus came to bring a new covenant of love beyond what we can imagine. Christianity, and the Church - which is the gathered body of Christ - is not going anywhere. It has looked and will continue to look different as years go by, but the lasting truth is that this is ok. It is even more than ok, it is holy and blessed.

My mum has a beautiful ornament - a dandelion clock encased in glass. I've often wondered how it was created. How could something so fragile be captured in something as volatile as molten glass, and then safely preserved? I have no idea, but somehow it is a reality. Somehow that delicate, beautiful flower is held safely.

We are the same. By ourselves we are fleeting, but through God's unwavering love and guidance the church is brought from year to year, from century to century, from age to age, and the essence of what it is - a collection of people who love God, and love their neighbour as themselves, remains steadfast. Mysterious fragility held and carried safely in a strength which is beyond it.

What we have to bring is more than enough for God to do God's work. In fact, the time, talent, or treasure you are able to offer is enough to feed a multitude. All you have to do is to bring it and offer it to Jesus. After all, we each have that bright and mighty tiny spark of the Holy Spirit, God's breath living within us, which takes what we have to offer and transforms it into abundance.

'It is I, do not be afraid', says Jesus. May you be filled with all the fullness of God as we head into the future together, to see what wonders of abundance God has in store.

Amen.

God grant that you be strengthened with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are rooted and grounded in love, and the blessing...