

## St. Lawrence 29 07 18 – Feeding of 5,000

When I was a young lad, I belonged to a Bible Class group called Kings Own. Amongst a number of other activities, we sometimes used to go on hikes. (For the benefit of those present under the age of consent, a hike, in those days, was simply a long walk!).

A kind of routine developed over the years. We'd all get our sensible walking gear on, the girls somehow managing to combine walking gear with clothing clearly designed to attract the attention of the older boys without being so revealing as to attract the less welcome attention of parents and leaders. Part of that gear was, for the boys, a haversack, usually khaki, worn uncomfortably on the back and giving a distinctly military look to us too-young-to-be-soldiers-yet tough guys. For the girls a more feminine looking cloth bag, often with flowered decoration and worn over the shoulder in a more debonair and sometimes almost flirtatious manner.

The important element was what was actually in those haversacks and bags, because the hike would be far and long enough to include a stop for lunch. For most of us boys, what was in that haversack was the standard and much-loved hiking fare – corned beef and tomato sauce sandwiches and Tizer – or perhaps, for some, Dandelion and Burdock. But corned beef and Tizer, in its unmistakable unusually shaped bottle was the prized and standard fare for most.

The problem was that there were always one or two who would either forget or deliberately decline to bring their lunch –and possibly the odd one whose parents, unbeknown to us, couldn't really afford to get such luxuries – and who would, therefore, rely on the rest of us to share our prized corned beef and Tizer with them or risk the rebuke of the leaders to whom we showed great respect. We all knew who they were. It was the same ones most times. 3

So as the lunch stop drew closer and closer there would be a noticeable drop in animated conversation and an equally noticeable increase in the surreptitious glances towards the known usual suspects and between each other as we each tried hard not to be the first to reveal the hidden treasure that meant so much to us. So there we would eventually sit, the boys as close to the girls as they dared, the girls somehow managing to end up sitting together in a group surprisingly close to the male leaders, including my elder sister who, probably much the same as the other girls, had a hopeless crush on the Curate.

And so we would sit, waiting to see who would be the first to open up the haversack and draw out those vital food elements which then, inevitably, would end up having to be shared with not only the unfortunates who had left their lunch behind, but - worst of all – with the ones we all knew and hated with a deep Christian hatred who always seemed

to get away with their characteristically selfish and anti-social attitude towards the rest of us.

And an hour later, it somehow would always be the same. Everyone would have eaten and drunk, the corned beef and Tizer enjoyed by all and sundry and enough left in now less tightly closed haversacks and bags for a later stop for tea. A miracle.

I often think of that when I hear or read the story of the feeding of 5,000 or more people in the Gospels, especially in the version we heard just now in John's Gospel when that unselfish and, perhaps, rather naïve boy came forward and said "I've got five loaves and two fish if that's any help"!

Is the corned beef and Tizer situation something at-all close to what was going on amongst those 5,000 people?

Some of you will remember how, some 25 or so years ago, we performed Miracle Man through the streets of Abbots Langley, imagining how the miracles recorded in the Gospels might have been experienced if they had happened here instead of in first-century Palestine. A girl with AIDS, shunned as a leper found herself actually liked and touched by the Miracle Man and his followers; a woman who had refused to see what was around her found herself properly sighted and keeping company with someone who had previously been crippled by laziness and dependency on others.

Down the road, in the grounds of the Breakspeare School, a group of youngsters with learning difficulties found themselves unable to eat the food on plates immediately in front of them. The spoons they had been given to eat with were some four feet long - that's about 120 cm in today's currency. But then, with a large crowd of onlookers full of admiration, one of them loudly offered a solution - instead of trying to feed themselves, why not feed each other? There and then, they all turned their spoons away from themselves and towards each other. To the accompaniment of a good deal of laughter and some tears, everyone around the table was fed, albeit with a diet of jelly babies and smarties! 6

Those are the kind of thoughts in my mind when I try to envisage those 5,000 plus people, out for the day, so to speak, to hang on the words and activities of their own national celebrity, apparently none of thinking of coming prepared for the length of time they must have known it would take for them all to walk from their houses to wherever Jesus was now ministering and teaching.

And that's why I tend to focus my thoughts on that boy with his childlike and unselfish attitude to the thousands of people around him. I wonder, is perhaps the real miracle of that day the calling out of unselfish care and concern for other people, exemplified by that boy? Was there actually already enough food to feed them all and, indeed, to ensure that there was plenty left over to be shared even further?

And, in thinking this way, am I now belittling the miraculous powers of Jesus, God become human, the Miracle Man himself?

I really don't think so. Well of course I don't, otherwise I wouldn't be publicly expressing my thoughts in this way.

I have always believed in the integrity of the natural laws which govern this world and I have always doubted that the God whose design it all is would suspend or interfere with those natural laws, whether to protect us from harm or to answer our prayers to make life better for us. Of course there have been times when that view has been challenged either by circumstances or even by colleagues. At a time of impending personal loss I have even asked God to prove me wrong!

But accepting possible human and natural forces at work in miraculous experiences in no way belittles my respect for the Lord and God I see in Christ. I see his miraculous powers at work in the hearts and minds of otherwise quite self-centred people who, when occasion demands, put themselves last and others first. I think of those terror attacks and the way 'ordinary' people have found themselves risking, and sometimes losing, their own lives and well-being to protect and care for victims they otherwise would never know. I think of the stories that always emerge from natural or human disasters - divers risking, or losing, their lives to rescue trapped boys in flooded caves; neighbours going into burning buildings to help weaker at-risk sometimes complete strangers, sometimes people they really don't like, from injury or death.

Think of that boy. "I've got five loaves and two fish - is that any good?" What a miracle it would be if we all were prepared to offer whatever we have and whatever we are to meet the needs of those around us or even far away from us.

And if you remember nothing else from that corned beef and Tizer story, just remember that those who eventually benefitted from the grudging generosity shown by some of us included the very ones whom we knew full well didn't deserve it at-all. If we want the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand to be a reality in our lives never ever let us exclude from our generosity those whom we consider to be totally unworthy of our giving.

Now that really would be something of a miracle.

Brian Hibberd

## St. Lawrence 29 07 18 – Feeding of 5,000

When I was a young lad, I belonged to a Bible Class group called Kings Own. Amongst a number of other activities, we sometimes used to go on hikes. (For the benefit of those present under the age of consent, a hike, in those days, was simply a long walk!).

A kind of routine developed over the years. We'd all get our sensible walking gear on, the girls somehow managing to combine walking gear with clothing clearly designed to attract the attention of the older boys without being so revealing as to attract the less welcome attention of parents and leaders. Part of that gear was, for the boys, a haversack, usually khaki, worn uncomfortably on the back and giving a distinctly military look to us too-young-to-be-soldiers-yet tough guys. For the girls a more feminine looking cloth bag, often with flowered decoration and worn over the shoulder in a more debonair and sometimes almost flirtatious manner.

The important element was what was actually in those haversacks and bags, because the hike would be far and long enough to include a stop for lunch. For most of us boys, what was in that haversack was the standard and much-loved hiking fare – corned beef and tomato sauce sandwiches and Tizer – or perhaps, for some, Dandelion and Burdock. But corned beef and Tizer, in its unmistakable unusually shaped bottle was the prized and standard fare for most.

The problem was that there were always one or two who would either forget or deliberately decline to bring their lunch –and possibly the odd one whose parents, unbeknown to us, couldn't really afford to get such luxuries – and who would, therefore, rely on the rest of us to share our prized corned beef and Tizer with them or risk the rebuke of the leaders to whom we showed great respect. We all knew who they were. It was the same ones most times. 3

So as the lunch stop drew closer and closer there would be a noticeable drop in animated conversation and an equally noticeable increase in the surreptitious glances towards the known usual suspects and between each other as we each tried hard not to be the first to reveal the hidden treasure that meant so much to us. So there we would eventually sit, the boys as close to the girls as they dared, the girls somehow managing to end up sitting together in a group surprisingly close to the male leaders, including my elder sister who, probably much the same as the other girls, had a hopeless crush on the Curate.

And so we would sit, waiting to see who would be the first to open up the haversack and draw out those vital food elements which then, inevitably, would end up having to be shared with not only the unfortunates who had left their lunch behind, but - worst of all – with the ones we all knew and hated with a deep Christian hatred who always seemed

to get away with their characteristically selfish and anti-social attitude towards the rest of us.

And an hour later, it somehow would always be the same. Everyone would have eaten and drunk, the corned beef and Tizer enjoyed by all and sundry and enough left in now less tightly closed haversacks and bags for a later stop for tea. A miracle.

I often think of that when I hear or read the story of the feeding of 5,000 or more people in the Gospels, especially in the version we heard just now in John's Gospel when that unselfish and, perhaps, rather naïve boy came forward and said "I've got five loaves and two fish if that's any help"!

Is the corned beef and Tizer situation something at-all close to what was going on amongst those 5,000 people?

Some of you will remember how, some 25 or so years ago, we performed Miracle Man through the streets of Abbots Langley, imagining how the miracles recorded in the Gospels might have been experienced if they had happened here instead of in first-century Palestine. A girl with AIDS, shunned as a leper found herself actually liked and touched by the Miracle Man and his followers; a woman who had refused to see what was around her found herself properly sighted and keeping company with someone who had previously been crippled by laziness and dependency on others.

Down the road, in the grounds of the Breakspeare School, a group of youngsters with learning difficulties found themselves unable to eat the food on plates immediately in front of them. The spoons they had been given to eat with were some four feet long - that's about 120 cm in today's currency. But then, with a large crowd of onlookers full of admiration, one of them loudly offered a solution - instead of trying to feed themselves, why not feed each other? There and then, they all turned their spoons away from themselves and towards each other. To the accompaniment of a good deal of laughter and some tears, everyone around the table was fed, albeit with a diet of jelly babies and smarties! 6

Those are the kind of thoughts in my mind when I try to envisage those 5,000 plus people, out for the day, so to speak, to hang on the words and activities of their own national celebrity, apparently none of thinking of coming prepared for the length of time they must have known it would take for them all to walk from their houses to wherever Jesus was now ministering and teaching.

And that's why I tend to focus my thoughts on that boy with his childlike and unselfish attitude to the thousands of people around him. I wonder, is perhaps the real miracle of that day the calling out of unselfish care and concern for other people, exemplified by that boy? Was there actually already enough food to feed them all and, indeed, to ensure that there was plenty left over to be shared even further?

And, in thinking this way, am I now belittling the miraculous powers of Jesus, God become human, the Miracle Man himself?

I really don't think so. Well of course I don't, otherwise I wouldn't be publicly expressing my thoughts in this way.

I have always believed in the integrity of the natural laws which govern this world and I have always doubted that the God whose design it all is would suspend or interfere with those natural laws, whether to protect us from harm or to answer our prayers to make life better for us. Of course there have been times when that view has been challenged either by circumstances or even by colleagues. At a time of impending personal loss I have even asked God to prove me wrong!

But accepting possible human and natural forces at work in miraculous experiences in no way belittles my respect for the Lord and God I see in Christ. I see his miraculous powers at work in the hearts and minds of otherwise quite self-centred people who, when occasion demands, put themselves last and others first. I think of those terror attacks and the way 'ordinary' people have found themselves risking, and sometimes losing, their own lives and well-being to protect and care for victims they otherwise would never know. I think of the stories that always emerge from natural or human disasters - divers risking, or losing, their lives to rescue trapped boys in flooded caves; neighbours going into burning buildings to help weaker at-risk sometimes complete strangers, sometimes people they really don't like, from injury or death.

Think of that boy. "I've got five loaves and two fish - is that any good?" What a miracle it would be if we all were prepared to offer whatever we have and whatever we are to meet the needs of those around us or even far away from us.

And if you remember nothing else from that corned beef and Tizer story, just remember that those who eventually benefitted from the grudging generosity shown by some of us included the very ones whom we knew full well didn't deserve it at-all. If we want the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand to be a reality in our lives never ever let us exclude from our generosity those whom we consider to be totally unworthy of our giving.

Now that really would be something of a miracle.

Brian Hibberd

## St. Lawrence 29 07 18 – Feeding of 5,000

When I was a young lad, I belonged to a Bible Class group called Kings Own. Amongst a number of other activities, we sometimes used to go on hikes. (For the benefit of those present under the age of consent, a hike, in those days, was simply a long walk!).

A kind of routine developed over the years. We'd all get our sensible walking gear on, the girls somehow managing to combine walking gear with clothing clearly designed to attract the attention of the older boys without being so revealing as to attract the less welcome attention of parents and leaders. Part of that gear was, for the boys, a haversack, usually khaki, worn uncomfortably on the back and giving a distinctly military look to us too-young-to-be-soldiers-yet tough guys. For the girls a more feminine looking cloth bag, often with flowered decoration and worn over the shoulder in a more debonair and sometimes almost flirtatious manner.

The important element was what was actually in those haversacks and bags, because the hike would be far and long enough to include a stop for lunch. For most of us boys, what was in that haversack was the standard and much-loved hiking fare – corned beef and tomato sauce sandwiches and Tizer – or perhaps, for some, Dandelion and Burdock. But corned beef and Tizer, in its unmistakable unusually shaped bottle was the prized and standard fare for most.

The problem was that there were always one or two who would either forget or deliberately decline to bring their lunch –and possibly the odd one whose parents, unbeknown to us, couldn't really afford to get such luxuries – and who would, therefore, rely on the rest of us to share our prized corned beef and Tizer with them or risk the rebuke of the leaders to whom we showed great respect. We all knew who they were. It was the same ones most times. 3

So as the lunch stop drew closer and closer there would be a noticeable drop in animated conversation and an equally noticeable increase in the surreptitious glances towards the known usual suspects and between each other as we each tried hard not to be the first to reveal the hidden treasure that meant so much to us. So there we would eventually sit, the boys as close to the girls as they dared, the girls somehow managing to end up sitting together in a group surprisingly close to the male leaders, including my elder sister who, probably much the same as the other girls, had a hopeless crush on the Curate.

And so we would sit, waiting to see who would be the first to open up the haversack and draw out those vital food elements which then, inevitably, would end up having to be shared with not only the unfortunates who had left their lunch behind, but - worst of all – with the ones we all knew and hated with a deep Christian hatred who always seemed

to get away with their characteristically selfish and anti-social attitude towards the rest of us.

And an hour later, it somehow would always be the same. Everyone would have eaten and drunk, the corned beef and Tizer enjoyed by all and sundry and enough left in now less tightly closed haversacks and bags for a later stop for tea. A miracle.

I often think of that when I hear or read the story of the feeding of 5,000 or more people in the Gospels, especially in the version we heard just now in John's Gospel when that unselfish and, perhaps, rather naïve boy came forward and said "I've got five loaves and two fish if that's any help"!

Is the corned beef and Tizer situation something at-all close to what was going on amongst those 5,000 people?

Some of you will remember how, some 25 or so years ago, we performed Miracle Man through the streets of Abbots Langley, imagining how the miracles recorded in the Gospels might have been experienced if they had happened here instead of in first-century Palestine. A girl with AIDS, shunned as a leper found herself actually liked and touched by the Miracle Man and his followers; a woman who had refused to see what was around her found herself properly sighted and keeping company with someone who had previously been crippled by laziness and dependency on others.

Down the road, in the grounds of the Breakspeare School, a group of youngsters with learning difficulties found themselves unable to eat the food on plates immediately in front of them. The spoons they had been given to eat with were some four feet long - that's about 120 cm in today's currency. But then, with a large crowd of onlookers full of admiration, one of them loudly offered a solution - instead of trying to feed themselves, why not feed each other? There and then, they all turned their spoons away from themselves and towards each other. To the accompaniment of a good deal of laughter and some tears, everyone around the table was fed, albeit with a diet of jelly babies and smarties! 6

Those are the kind of thoughts in my mind when I try to envisage those 5,000 plus people, out for the day, so to speak, to hang on the words and activities of their own national celebrity, apparently none of thinking of coming prepared for the length of time they must have known it would take for them all to walk from their houses to wherever Jesus was now ministering and teaching.

And that's why I tend to focus my thoughts on that boy with his childlike and unselfish attitude to the thousands of people around him. I wonder, is perhaps the real miracle of that day the calling out of unselfish care and concern for other people, exemplified by that boy? Was there actually already enough food to feed them all and, indeed, to ensure that there was plenty left over to be shared even further?

And, in thinking this way, am I now belittling the miraculous powers of Jesus, God become human, the Miracle Man himself?

I really don't think so. Well of course I don't, otherwise I wouldn't be publicly expressing my thoughts in this way.

I have always believed in the integrity of the natural laws which govern this world and I have always doubted that the God whose design it all is would suspend or interfere with those natural laws, whether to protect us from harm or to answer our prayers to make life better for us. Of course there have been times when that view has been challenged either by circumstances or even by colleagues. At a time of impending personal loss I have even asked God to prove me wrong!

But accepting possible human and natural forces at work in miraculous experiences in no way belittles my respect for the Lord and God I see in Christ. I see his miraculous powers at work in the hearts and minds of otherwise quite self-centred people who, when occasion demands, put themselves last and others first. I think of those terror attacks and the way 'ordinary' people have found themselves risking, and sometimes losing, their own lives and well-being to protect and care for victims they otherwise would never know. I think of the stories that always emerge from natural or human disasters - divers risking, or losing, their lives to rescue trapped boys in flooded caves; neighbours going into burning buildings to help weaker at-risk sometimes complete strangers, sometimes people they really don't like, from injury or death.

Think of that boy. "I've got five loaves and two fish - is that any good?" What a miracle it would be if we all were prepared to offer whatever we have and whatever we are to meet the needs of those around us or even far away from us.

And if you remember nothing else from that corned beef and Tizer story, just remember that those who eventually benefitted from the grudging generosity shown by some of us included the very ones whom we knew full well didn't deserve it at-all. If we want the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand to be a reality in our lives never ever let us exclude from our generosity those whom we consider to be totally unworthy of our giving.

Now that really would be something of a miracle.

Brian Hibberd