

Pentecost 9B 2021  
2 Samuel 11.1-15  
Ephesians 3.14-21  
John 6.1-21

- **There is no doubt that we are living in difficult times at the moment as the world tries to manage Covid 19. Certainly, in Australia it's not been as difficult as in many parts of the world, and really things have been much better in South Australia than other parts of Australia - Sydney and Melbourne especially and that's even despite the current lockdown.**
- **But even given that, the continued uncertainty of changing restrictions, the threat and possibility of a widespread outbreak of Covid 19, and our inability to live as we used to do is very wearing. I acknowledge that the uncertainty and changes of restrictions is especially wearing on clergy and lay leaders, and I appreciate all that is being done not just to keep things going safely, but also to look for the opportunities for God's mission amongst the changes and challenges.**
- **We are of course not the first to live in tough times. In the past 100 years or so Australia has seen the Spanish flu epidemic where 15,000 Australians died and somewhere between a quarter and a third of Australians were infected. There were also major polio epidemics in the 30's, 40's and 50's which impacted many in Australia.**

**And then there was the widespread suffering of the depression and two world wars.**

- **There have been some stormy times in the past as well as in the present. Suffering and hardship is not new, though that doesn't make it any easier to deal with.**
- **The gospel reading today came from John's gospel and chances are the Christian community for which John's gospel was written was also experiencing tough times. Christianity was very much a minority religion at that time. Christians were often treated with suspicion, and many suffered significant persecution.**
- **The purpose of John's gospel is very clear. It's very clear because the gospel tells us what its purpose is. Towards the end, in chapter 21 verse 30 we read this:**
  - **'Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name'.**
- **So, the point of the gospel of John is to help people believe that Jesus is the Messiah, and that through believing we may have life in his name.**

- The word 'believe' is not talking about just mental assent, it's talking also about trust. So, if we think about 'trust' when we hear the word 'believe', we will be close to the mark.
- John is not the only gospel that is explicit about its purpose. Luke's gospel and its second volume the Acts of the Apostles is also very clear about its purpose. They were written to help someone called Theophilus know the truth about Jesus. We find that reference at the beginning of Luke's gospel.
- So, if the point of John's gospel is to help us trust that Jesus is the Messiah and so have life in his name, and if the context probably included hardship and persecution and perhaps stormy times for the followers of Jesus, we need to read the gospel in that light. What then what might we make of today's gospel reading?
- The gospel reading is in two parts. The first significant part is the feeding of the five thousand, and that begins at verse 4 and goes to the end of verse 14. And the second part starts at verse 16 and goes to the end of the passage. That's the story of Jesus walking on the water.
- Given the purpose of John's gospel what can we learn about Jesus from these events?
- The first event starts with a situation of very great need. Thousands of people had come out to see Jesus, to hear his teaching and to bring their sick to him for healing.
- They were enthusiastic to hear Jesus and see what he was doing, but many were also desperate for help. They were also out a long way from villages where they could get food. They were in need in so many ways.
- Jesus' disciples were concerned that the crowd had no food, but the disciples didn't know how to provide it. In verse 7 Philip says, 'six months wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little'. They had a big problem. The problem was beyond the disciples capacity to solve. Then one of the disciples spotted a young boy who had a few little bread rolls and two dried fish. Lunch for one boy.
- Jesus told the disciples to get the people to sit down. Jesus took the bread and fish, gave thanks to God who had provided them through the boy, and then started to distribute the five small bread rolls and two dried fish among the people. When everyone had enough, they collected the left overs and there was a lot left over (twelve baskets full).
- So, what does this say about Jesus? Verse 14 says - 'when the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to

say, this is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world’.

- What does this story say about Jesus to a church which was going through a hard time and to people who were still learning about Jesus?
- It says Jesus is the Messiah who is to bring healing and wholeness to the world. It says Jesus will provide more than is needed. It says Jesus will take the small amount of whatever we have and make it enough. It says our job as disciples is to spot what we do have and offer what we have even if it isn’t very much. It says we can trust Jesus to provide what we need and more than what we need.
- And so, to the second part of the reading today. Verses 15 to 20.
- After the events of the day Jesus withdrew by himself. No doubt for some prayer and rest. The disciples went down to the Sea of Galilee in the evening and started to row over, to cross over to the other side of the lake. The conditions became rough and stormy. A strong wind was blowing, and the sea became choppy.
- After a few miles they saw Jesus walking on the water towards them and they were terrified. I guess they thought they were seeing a ghost. But Jesus said: ‘it is I; do not be afraid’. Then the text says - ‘immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going’.

- So what do we make of this given the purpose of the gospel and the context of the people for whom it was first written?
- The disciples were in a tough situation. They were in a storm. They’d have been battling. Three or four miles out, (five or six kilometres), they were a long way from the shore, no life jackets or EPIRB, or mobile phone.
- Jesus came to them and said, ‘it is I don’t be afraid’. Then the key part of this text - ‘immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going’. They reached safety. They were struggling no more. Jesus was with them, and they were ok.
- What is this two-part passage telling us about Jesus? What is this two-part passage telling us as Jesus’ disciples, Jesus’ church, as we navigate the tough time of Covid 19, but also as we navigate the tough time we are having as the church in Australia, with shrinking and ageing congregations and a society which is increasingly disinterested in Christianity if not becoming hostile to Christianity?
- This passage urges us to look to Jesus who is trustworthy. Trust Jesus who is worth trusting. He is the Messiah. He is the saviour of the world. No matter what happens we do not need to be afraid. We can turn to Jesus and trust him. We can decide to be afraid if we want to do that of

course, but there is an alternative and that is Jesus.

Whatever happens. Whatever our circumstance.

- No matter how bad things get, personally or as a church, we can trust Jesus. We can trust that Jesus will provide all we need and therefore as we confront the present and the future, we can hear Jesus words: 'it is I; do not be afraid'.
- The second reflection comes from the disciple who spotted the young boy with a few little bread rolls and two dried fish. It wasn't the case that the crowd had nothing. They didn't have much, but they didn't have nothing. The disciple spotted the young boy and what he had, and the young boy offered what he had. Jesus did the rest.
- Trusting Jesus doesn't mean we sit passively and just wait for Jesus to do his thing. It means that we do what we can do and trust Jesus to do his thing. It means we offer what we can offer. Make use of what we have got, and what we can do, trusting that Jesus will make it enough. So that means when we look at a big problem, beyond our resources, we don't just give up and say it's impossible. When we look at a big problem, we see what we have and offer that to Jesus and see what he can make of it.

- I think sometimes we forget that Jesus is alive. We forget that Jesus is our living Lord. He is not just an historical figure in the past. He is alive now. He is Lord now. He is the Messiah now. And Jesus is not just sitting about doing nothing. Jesus continues to be Lord. To act as Lord. He is worth trusting no matter how tough things get. And that trust leads to peace, no matter what. It leads to real life. Life in his name. Life in his way. Life that brings joy and peace no matter what.
- We are in a tough time. Just as Christians have been before. We can respond with fear or anxiety or despondency or hopelessness. Or we can hear the testimony of John's gospel and trust Jesus the Messiah and have life in his name, now. We must never forget: 'It is I, do not be afraid'.