

Monday March 15 John 6:1-13 – thanks for our food (in spite of Brexit)

- 1 Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias),
- 2 and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick.
- 3 Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples.
- 4 The Jewish Passover Feast was near.
- 5 When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?”
- 6 He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.
- 7 Philip answered him, “Eight months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!”
- 8 Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up,
- 9 “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?”
- 10 Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them.
- 11 Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.
- 12 When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, “Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.”
- 13 So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

In 1990 my work with a missionary society took me to east Africa. On one occasion I was in the Tanzanian coastal city of Dar es Salaam. One stifling hot and humid afternoon, I went with my colleagues to visit someone in their home. We were delighted to see our host bring out ice-cold bottles of Seven-Up for us all to drink, but we had to wait while he said a prayer of thanks over them; that was the first time I had ever heard grace being said over bottles of fizzy drinks!

Perhaps it’s in parts of the world where people can’t take regular supplies of food for granted the way we do in Europe that they consciously express their dependence upon God for it with THANKSGIVING. We say ‘Give us this day our daily bread’ often enough, but I wonder how often we stop to really think about what we’re saying here? And another question: how often do we say grace over our meals?

At the moment food seems more important than usual; after Brexit some of our supermarket shelves aren’t so full any more, but I’m not going to get into the politics of that. Because of the pandemic, restaurants are closed; so are coffee shops. I do miss my occasional morning scone. Meanwhile, if you want to eat a cooked meal, you cook it yourself, day after day, week after week, unless you can find somewhere that you can collect from or that delivers to your doorstep. While cafés and restaurants suffer, the supermarkets are doing a roaring trade. When I go out for a walk, I might see several delivery vans out on their rounds. When our fortnightly order arrives at the front door, it’s one of the events that add variety to the routine of the week. So why not learn – or learn *again* – to say grace before your next meal, whether it be a slap-up evening nosh, or a snack lunch, or your morning porridge and toast? You might be a bit embarrassed at first, but that soon wears off.

And you would be in good company. Jesus started off feeding the 5,000 plus in John’s Gospel chapter 6 by giving thanks for the bread and the fish that a boy had given him. Then everyone got fed, and there were basketfuls left over when they’d all finished. I wonder if we would enjoy our food more if we started off each

time with THANKSGIVING to a Creator God who knows how to provide, in the words of Psalm 104, wine to gladden our hearts and bread to sustain us.