

JEHOVAH, ALLELUIA, THE LORD WILL PROVIDE
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(Readings; Psalm 145.10-18; Ephesians 3.14-21; John 6.1-21)

1) It's good to share in worship with you all in this season of summer. At the moment we're preparing for our summer break but it's not like our usual plan. There is no trip to the Italian lakes or feasting in festas in hillside towns & villages; instead it's a week in Criccieth in N Wales, hoping that the present sunshine lasts.

2) But not to worry. Some of those themes are picked up in today's Gospel reading from John, which is set by a lakeside (Galilee) with crowds gathering first to hear Jesus - then wondering how they will all be fed.

3) When I was much younger, I recall a spiritual by Harry Belafonte which my Dad had on a record which went 'Jehovah, Alleluia, the Lord will provide'. I have a sense that both our readings today involve trusting that the Lord will provide; but the underlying question is HOW will God do it? How does the Lord provide?

4) Now the FEEDING of the crowd is a miracle common to all Gospels accounts; but as usual, John has his own particular way of telling the story; so what's distinctive in John's account of the event?

5) In his account like the others, the disciples are facing a crisis; how to feed so many when there's no food. The answer to their dilemma begins when a little boy offers up what he has - 5 loaves and 2 fishes. Jesus then tells the people to sit down, blesses the food and suddenly there's enough to feed all (and more).

6) Now Biblical scholars note the eucharistic theme to story; how Jesus takes bread, gives thanks, breaks and gives the bread (symbolic of communion); but what's equally significant is that when someone (in this case a young boy) starts to share, there's more than enough for all - and indeed some 12 baskets left over.

7) Furthermore in John's account, this story is immediately followed by the episode involving a STORM.

It's the strange account of how the disciples start to panic when faced with a sudden squall on Lake Galilee (which is somewhat surprising given that a number of them of them are experienced fishermen.)

8) What appears to throw them is when Jesus appears 'walking on sea' towards them. It's as if this serves to remind them that he's not with them in the boat; that they're on own - which is when they start to panic

9) Jesus' response is deeply symbolic. He says 'Do not be afraid; it's I' (or in Greek 'I am'.) This is an echo of the name of God given to Moses ('I am who I am') when he leads God's people out of slavery into freedom.

Jesus' words are sufficient to calm both waves & disciples minds; the panic is over when Jesus is with them.

10) So we have 2 stories of Jesus being with disciples in time of crisis; the first is when the challenge is how to feed the crowds, and the second is how to calm the storm when the disciples start to panic in the boat.

11) In both cases it's fascinating how Jesus' response is to draw out what they already know or possess.

In the feeding miracle, it's a sharing of the food which offers more than enough for all (& baskets left over)

In the storm on the lake, it's the recognition that when they know Jesus is with them, they can cope.

13) That's both a challenging and encouraging message for us to hear today after 18 months of Coronavirus restrictions. We're all too aware of having to face 'storms and crises'. We're all too conscious that our resources appear short, that we will need to prioritise and try to make the best use of what we have.

14) Yet the New Testament witness is to a God who has already richly blessed us and given us more than we need. That's the message of Ephesians; that we've already been blessed with the 'riches of his glory' and that we now need to be 'strengthened with power through the Spirit' & 'filled with the fulness of God'.

15) There's a strong sense here, as in so many of Paul's letters, that we don't need anything more; that we already have more than we need in our shared life in Christ if we can only realise the riches that we have.

It's all summed up in that blessing in Chapter 3, which begins 'Now to him who is able by the power...'

16) But what is that POWER & where does it come from? The witness of Ephesians is that it's not something which comes to us from outside or elsewhere; rather it is God's spirit alive and at work in and through us – enabling us to do far more than we can conceive or imagine without it.

17) Now I began with Harry Belafonte's Spiritual 'Jehovah, Alleluia, the Lord will provide'. The message remains trusted & true, that the Lord will provide; but not if we expect God to do all the work without us.

18) Rather it's God who is counting on us to do our bit to help fulfil his promises. There will be no sudden intervention from God on outside – if we don't do our bit with the gifts and riches we possess on the inside. And the testimony of faith is, that if we do, and we do it together, it will be enough (with baskets to spare).

19) So we finish with the BLESSING – which is also a PROMISE. 'Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever, Amen.'