

Eight Sunday after Trinity Sunday 2 August 2020

Collect

Almighty Lord and everlasting God

We beseech you to direct, sanctify and govern both our hearts and our bodies in the ways of your laws and the works of your commandments;

That through your most mighty protection, both here and ever,
we may be preserved in body and soul

Through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,

who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit
now and forever

Amen

Readings

Isaiah 55:1-5

Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters;

and you that have no money, come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labour for that which does not satisfy?

Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.

Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live.

I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.

See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples.

See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you,
because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

Romans 9: 1-5

I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit— I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.

Matthew 14: 13-21

Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, 'This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.' Jesus said to them, 'They need not go away; you give them something to eat.' They replied, 'We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.' And he said, 'Bring them here to me.' Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Reflection

Until recently it was common here for large crowds to gather, to listen to a speaker, or hear a music festival or watch theatre – now those gatherings are much more uncommon as people everywhere are cautious about crowding together and about travel. All of the major summer events; Glyndebourne, Ascot, Henley Regatta, Wimbledon to name but a few, have been cancelled. For those of us who have attended such events in the past we can remember the preparation that goes into them. Many events involve an elaborate picnic and dressing in finery. Plastic cups and paper plates simply won't do. The picnic basket, preferably of the beautiful wicker variety, must contain china plates, glasses and proper cutlery. You also need chairs, a table and probably a tablecloth. You need to find the right space to sit. Or perhaps if you are going to a different type of concert (and you are significantly younger than me!) you need a tent, a sleeping bag and, if you want to avoid having to pay festival prices, your food for the weekend. Most important is the right gear, including wellies and waterproofs in case of rain. Without the right preparations, we worry that we won't have a good time – that the experience will be less than it should be.

The crowds in our reading today have not many any such preparations. Carried away by the charismatic teaching they have heard, they want to hear more. But the disciples point out the practical considerations of such a large number of people in a deserted place. It always makes me smile that the bible is much too polite to mention the lack of toilet facilities such a gathering can precipitate but it does focus on that other vital human need – the need for nourishment! Jesus sees no problem. "You give them something to eat," he tells them. The disciples have nothing, but, using a boy's five loaves and two fishes, Jesus makes sure that there is more than enough for everyone so the crowd can continue to hear his message.

So much can go into preparing to attend a music event in our own lives that the music may seem secondary. If we get the picnic wrong, or fail to bring enough cutlery, Glyndebourne could be ruined. If we forget our wellies and it rains, the festival experience will be a disaster. We forget that the music will still be the same – sublime, inspiring, emotional and exciting – and we are in great company. It is never all about the food or the tent. Jesus' followers didn't think of making preparations for the desert, but Jesus not only fulfilled their spiritual and healing needs, but also provided physical sustenance, which they hadn't thought to bring. Shared experiences are always the best, and Jesus created one from nothing, without planning or effort.

How often have you experienced that impromptu supper or bbq with friends that turns into the best night ever. When we least expect it, when we make no preparations and come with no expectations the music of life can be great, and the friendship wonderful.

And it can be the same when we meet with God, we can have the same unexpected, uplifting experience. Creating life from nothing is, after all, God's speciality. So don't get too weighed down by the baggage of life, by the need to always be prepared for every eventuality. Trust that God will meet your needs, that the music of life can be stunning without the need for overwhelming preparation. I pray that may all find joy amid life's troubles and wonderful friends to share it with. Amen