

2 Kings 4.42-44

Ps 145.10-19

Ephesians 3.14-21

John 6.1-21 (Feeding of 5000)

All your works praise you, o Lord and your faithful servants bless you. (Ps.145.10)

This morning's psalm, verses from Psalm 145, is very fitting indeed as I am here preaching on my last Sunday as priest in charge of this parish. In fact, the readings are those from the lectionary for Trinity 8, but had I been asked to choose the readings for this my last Sunday here, I couldn't have done any better.

There is so much to be thankful for, such a sense of feeling blessed – in all that we have shared and built together over the last seven years; in the growth of this community both in numbers and in depth: growth in hope, and faith and love.

I have learned a huge amount in my seven years here – and I am grateful to all of you who have shared in the life of this church and our journey together – grateful for your trust, your faithfulness, your patience, your openness, your generosity, your companionship and readiness to forgive when I got it wrong.

Among my learning, two things stand out:

The first one is to learn rely on God every day, and to trust God's presence in all that is happening, and not only God's presence, to trust God's goodness at all times. I still have a long way to go with this but I hope I made a bit of progress in the last few years.

And the second thing is about what it means to be the Church. I have become much clearer that the church is about building loving, self-giving relationships, with one another and beyond, always open to the stranger and the person coming in need; grounded in the communion of our triune God – father, son and Holy spirit as we relate to God and one another.

In reality that's quite challenging, as we know, but if we build our community with God at the centre, with love, self-awareness and a readiness to forgive, with patience and a sense of humour when we run-up against challenges, always longing for God's kingdom, then the kingdom will grow.

And what these two insights have in common is the realisation that God provides!

The psalmist goes on to say:

'The eyes of all wait upon you, o Lord, and you give them their food in due season.

You open wide your hand and satisfy the need of every living creature. (16,17).

These verses are often used as a grace before meals – in fact, I grew up with the German version as our grace at mealtimes, but the verses are not just about the food we eat, but all that helps us to flourish and develop as human beings.

The eyes of all wait upon you. God invites us to turn to him in our need; to wait and trust and God will provide. You may have heard me say: God will provide. And I believe that. But I have yet to develop the serenity that goes with this knowledge.

It's good to remind ourselves of the many ways God has provided in the past and will provide in the future – something the psalmists do all the time, as do our Old Testament lesson and our gospel reading this morning. No one expected Jesus to be able to feed the large crowd that had come to hear him. Philip put it into words: 'Six months wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little. (Jn 6.7)' Yet, a boy with five barley loaves and two fish made all the difference and enabled Jesus to feed everyone with plenty of bread left over. God is able to work great things with little.

God has provided here at St. James, not just for me, but for us as a church and for our mission. If I list all the examples I can think of, we will be here for a long time this morning, so I will cite only a few.

Some of you will remember how hard I found it in the first years to be a half-time incumbent, the first half-time incumbent here, when there was so much to do; so many people to care for and reach out to.

And God provided extremely generous church wardens who saw their role to support me, morally and in very practical ways. God provided a congregation in which everyone is willing to contribute. And there was Geoffrey, who had so ably and lovingly looked after St. James during the last interregnum. I was thrilled when Geoffrey announced about six months in that he was going to make St. James his home church. And then God sent Debbie to assist in our parish, support me and offer her considerable gifts in the service of our church.

The Good News Club is another example from the early days. When I started I was keen to develop relations with the schools in the parish, particularly Queen Edith. The children and their families are such an important part of the community we serve. Caroline Peet, the head, a practicing Christian herself was extremely welcoming and supportive, giving me the opportunity to lead whole school assemblies a couple of times per term. About nine months into my time at St James I mentioned to Caroline Peet that I would like to find a way of being more involved in the School. My request was the answer to someone else's prayer, a parent who had been running the Good News Club in the school for many years, was looking for someone to take it over, as her daughter was moving into secondary school. A fantastic opportunity, which I could only take advantage of with the help of others. Four people from the congregation came forward offering to help, and the Good news club will continue thanks to the help of Ruth Newton, the children's worker at Queen Edith chapel, who has helped to lead it since 2013.

The banner project was a wonderful example of bringing together a number of people with creative gifts and the willingness to take on a project although it was hard to see how it all would work. The aim was to produce something worthwhile that we would be willing to hang on our sanctuary wall, but also make it a communal exercise. The team that took it on was asked to have courage, walk by faith, take risks, allow people of all ages to contribute their gifts and to spend many hours stitching away. On Pentecost Sunday 2012 we were awed by the sense of achievement made possible through the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

The last example I want to cite is Prayer48 – an idea that we owe to the parish of St. Gregory in Sudbury. Mary and Chris Calladine came across it and picked up their leaflets which they passed on to

me. I found them again during the sort-out in the autumn of 2012 and thought this would be a really good Lent project for us, reaching out to the whole parish and making ourselves available in prayer. The PCC was up for it. Mary Calladine was keen to take it on as her ALM project; Sophie Maggs, an ordinand from Ridley with design skills did the card; Samantha Stayte, an ordinand from Westcott wanted to be involved in a parish mission project and contributed hugely to the preparation and running of Prayer48 in Lent 2013. We had a great sense of being enriched and blessed by the experience and have done it every year since then.

I could go on and on.

As I take my leave today, I am sure that God will continue to provide – for all of us, as we are learning to rely on God, more and more every day, as we are learning to trust that God is good and with us in all things.

I pray and trust that God will continue to build you up as a community of love, faith, forgiveness and mutual care, which enables you to serve God and your neighbour in your daily lives and in this parish.

Geoffrey assures me that you will manage and that I can go!

And so, I want to end with St. Paul's words from our second lesson:

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name.

*I pray that, according to the riches of his glory,
he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit,*

*and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith,
as you are being rooted and grounded in love.*

I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

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, for ever and ever. Amen. (Eph.3.14-21)