



# Sunday Reflection

## 9<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew  
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 2 August 2020

# Pentecost 9

while all Church worship in the buildings is suspended

On this 9th Sunday after Pentecost, and the eighth Sunday after Trinity, as we meet to share what God offers us today, let us rejoice that we can experience it together. Whether we have made elaborate preparations or simply arrived on the spur of the moment, God will provide all we need in word, bread and wine.

## Reflection for this week's Gospel

**"He had compassion for them and cured their sick."**

Matthew 14.14

### An Illustration to set the scene

Attending a music event in the summer can be a major undertaking that requires a great deal of preparation. For classical music fans, events such as Glyndebourne in East Sussex involve taking 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. If you don't want to pay for a space in one of the sheltered areas, you can only hope for good weather, since gazebos are not permitted. You are advised to find your space before the concert begins, to ensure that everything is ready for the interval. If such complicated and time-consuming organisation is too much, you can hire your picnic equipment,

buy your picnic food on site and arrange for a porter to help with it all.

If classical music is not your thing, the preparations for attending a rock music festival can be every bit as complicated. 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 festival gear, including wellies and waterproofs in case of rain. In countries where rain is unlikely, protection against the sun can involve just as much work.

Without the right preparations, we worry that we won't have a good time – that the experience will be less than it should be.

### **Looking at the teaching of the Gospel**

In today's Gospel, the crowds are not unlike those at a modern-day music event, except they have made no preparations. Carried away by the charismatic teaching they have heard, they want to hear more. Following Jesus into the desert, they interrupt the time he has tried to carve out for himself after hearing that John the Baptist has been killed by Herod. We might expect him in his grief to turn the crowds away so he can deal with the terrible news. But, unlike many contemporary superstars, he has no sense of entitlement. Instead, he feels nothing but compassion for the people.

When the disciples point out the practical considerations of such a large number of people in a deserted place – they have no food – 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, he makes sure that there is more than enough for everyone so the crowd can continue to hear his message.

## **How can we reflect on the application to our lives?**

So much goes into preparing for a music event that a casual observer might conclude that the music is 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. The result must have been like a big party, where the people could enjoy a miraculous meal together, get to know one another and exchange their experiences of the things that Jesus said and did. Shared experiences are always the best, and Jesus created one from nothing, without planning or effort.

When we least expect it, when we make no preparations and come with no expectations other than a desire to encounter God, we can discover the same unexpected, life-giving transformation. Creating life from nothing is, after all, God's speciality. The music of life will be great, and the friendship wonderful, when we are unencumbered by the baggage that so often weighs us down, or by the elaborate preparations we feel we need to make in order to have a good time. It might be wise to pack a sandwich, but travel light. God takes care of all our needs and, essential though it is, the food is just a part of the whole.

**“He had compassion for them and cured their sick.”**

**Matthew 14.14**

Please share your response to this reflection to [Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk](mailto:Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk) – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God' spirit move

you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

**[www.SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk](http://www.SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk)**