

## Janice's Sermon from Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> July 2021

If had free choice of readings for my final Sunday could hardly have chosen better! What a gift! Even more so since I accidentally got the wrong readings after all! (too complicated to explain now - Ask me later) God-incid..

We've got Paul's beautiful prayer for the Ephesians which I read at the start of the service, echoes my desire for you and the parish as I leave – (I'll use it again at the end as a final prayer and blessing)

And Gospel reading of feeding 5000+ and ending with Jesus walking on water! Wow! Loves these stories. Indeed latter story has been really significant for me in last few years.

Today focussing on the miracle of the picnic. As I mulled it over, I was struck by the different responses to the problem facing them by 3 of the characters in this story,.

First - Philip..... basically says 'Don't be ridiculous!'

When Jesus asks Philip directly how they can feed these 5000+ people, Philip replies by saying how it will take more than half a years' wages to meet their need.

Don't read much about Philip in the Gospels – from Bethsaida like Peter and Andrew, so likely a fisherman;

He's the one who challenged Nathaniel to 'come and see', when he scoffed at Jesus being from Nazareth; and he's the guy who

when Jesus said 'I am the way the truth and the life, no one comes to Father except through me' said 'just show us the father and that will be enough!' He seems to be a very practical guy, a quick thinker, pragmatic, he can see the scale of problem and get to the nub of an issue quickly! But perhaps in his rush he forgets to consider the spiritual element.

That's what we see here. He sees the crowd and in response to Jesus' question about how are we going to feed the masses he basically says – we can't! or at least he highlights the practical impossibility. It's ridiculous!

Second response is from Andrew .... Who reacts with a tentative 'here's a possibility – might this work?'

Andrew was also a fisherman, the brother, probably younger brother, of Simon Peter. Again, like Philip, we hear little of him in the Gospels. But John's Gospel makes him out to be the first of the disciples to recognise Jesus as the Messiah – right from the start! When John the Baptist points Jesus out to Andrew, he goes to bro Peter and claims even then, 'we have found the Messiah'. He too seems to get to the heart of the matter but has his eyes open to that spiritual dimension.

So here, when faced with this impossible problem that practical Philip sees, he seems to think outside the, physical, material box, to begin to imagine something else might be possible. He brings the boy with 5 loaves and 2 fishes to Jesus. it's not much but it's something and who knows what Jesus might be able to do. Still

tentative, but one gets the sense that he realises that Jesus, as we hear in that prayer for Ephesians 'is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine.' I do wonder at this link between imagination and faith.

That leads us to the third character, the boy himself – faithfully surrendering all he had. An unnamed child, and yet perhaps the most significant, most exemplar response.

Children are good with imagination aren't they, playing make believe, let's pretend and they so easily accept what adults consider impossible. Children can often be more spiritually attuned to situations than adults and Jesus commends us to have the faith of child.

This boy, with his five loaves and 2 fish has been brought to Jesus, with the suggestion that this might solve the problem of feeding thousands of people!

Maybe the boy doesn't understand the scale of the problem, or maybe he's just doing what he's told, but maybe he simply believes that with Jesus anything is possible. He'll have come with the crowds who are following Jesus because of what they've seen and heard in the towns, so he knows that Jesus is a miracle maker. And with that simple knowledge he hands over his own food, surrenders what he has and lets Jesus do his thing. What faith!

So there we have Philip with his pragmatic 'Don't be ridiculous'

Andrew with his tentative 'Might this be possible?'

And the young boy with his surrendering 'Here you go. Do your thing!'

Might recognise all three responses in yourself – I certainly can - often as a recurring pattern and sometimes all at the same time!

When first discerning call to OPM – that's ridiculous, well maybe, OK I surrender.

When first considered the idea for developing the Gaff Youth Club into Sedbury Space – part of me thought it was bonkers, ridiculous idea, but at the same time I could see the possibility, and as we took the first tentative steps, very quickly realised that we had to go all in to make it happen.

When first saw job advert for my new post

- 1) when I first read through the parish and job profile and wondered whether this was God's call, my immediate reaction was 'Ridiculous! – no way! You cannot be serious! Too big, too many people, too urban, too far beyond my experience, it would take someone with, I don't know, but more than I've got to offer, I can't do it.' Really unsettled me!
- 2) Then after some reflection on reading through the profile a few more times, and praying about it, got to thinking 'well maybe... this is what I've been trained for, there are some similarities in context, my placement was relevant,

...perhaps God could do something with me, through me in this place???'

3) Then finally, realising that if this is what Jesus is planning then all I can do is humbly surrender whatever feeble gift/little offering I think I might have, to serve him, knowing that he has the power to make that humble offering into a picnic for 1000s. SO, yeah, Lord, I surrender.

It can be so tempting to hold back from serving God - maybe due to fear of failure, fear of letting others down, fear of stepping on toes, feeling unequal to the task, feeling unworthy, feeling the offering isn't enough, whatever! But that is focussing only on the material, the physical, our own human limitations!

But if surrender and humbly offer ourselves – with all strengths and weaknesses (for each of us a combination) who knows what God will be able to do in and through us. Faith heals, faith feeds thousands, faith saves and moves mountains.

As I approach this new ministry I feel like that little boy – humbly offering the little I have but in knowledge that I'm offering it to a mighty powerful God,

Still daunted, still have to gulp a few times when I consider it, but this isn't about me and my little loaf and fish, this is about God's amazing power at work, it's about him who can do immeasurably

more than all we can ask or imagine according to HIS power at work in us!

His power not mine, his gifts not mine, his plans not mine.

I may have been speaking personally but this goes for each of us and the future ministry here too.

I'm really excited about the future for this parish – re-opening after COVID and regathering as a faith community, chance to review and capture the vision again, new CYFM, new treasurer, considering the future of our church buildings, both here with the exciting plans to re-order the space, and St Luke's, both with their potential to serve the community.

And the future of the pioneer project as I move on, with Susan taking up the reins of Centre Manager at Sedbury Space and Lee stepping up to be Chair of Trustees.

And especially, most recently, the outcome of seeking to discern God's will about the Wellbeing Project and the community Chaplain, understandably close to my heart.

We laid down a fleece to determine whether this was of God – a God idea or just another good idea– always worth some wise discernment! With a tight time frame of 4 weeks we asked God to show us his will, by seeing if there would be enough financial support for the chaplain. If we didn't raise the minimum of £15K required, we'd have to humbly let it go.

Felt like an impossible amount, one might think it ridiculous!

But our tentative faith suggested it might be possible. Hence the fleece. Let's lay it down and see what God might do.

Individuals humbly offered, surrendered, what they had, £10 here, £20 there, a few gifts and pledges of hundreds and even thousands and within 4 weeks...

Not only had we raised the £15K, the necessary minimum, there was an overwhelming response, as people recognised the need and caught the vision of ministering holistic wellbeing to our parish. Almost £25K for 1<sup>st</sup> yr and some additional pledges for next couple of yrs to help secure the future of the project beyond the pilot year.

God did way more than we asked or imagined. Alleluia!

God is in this. God has the future of this parish in his hands. There are exciting times ahead as we....well, you!... this parish regathers and captures a fresh vision for ministry and mission. How might God be calling you to be involved?

*Last week sang one favourite songs (I have a lot!) 'Walk among them, I'll go with you Reach out to them with my hands, suffer with me and together we will serve them help them stand.'*

Some of you may wonder at enormity of task.

May feel doesn't involve you

May feel you have little to offer

May think, like Philip, that it's ridiculous to suggest that we could meet the needs of this parish, or that you could be part of God's kingdom plan in this place.

But if you reflect and ponder and pray a little, maybe you can begin to imagine the possibilities, see small ways in which you could be involved, a word of encouragement, prayerful support, financial offering, your time, a helping hand, a particular skill/talent. Maybe beginning to sense like Andrew, 'well Lord, I know it's a big task but might this help?

And once you begin to imagine that something might be possible, it's a natural next step to humbly surrender all you have and all you are to God's service.

Just to finish....[or to quote Mike Pilivachi of Soul Survivor 'coming in to land'] with this

Last week Ewen and I were given a cheque as a leaving gift from you all. Overwhelmed by your generosity – thank you so much. First thing I bought with it was a picture to hang in my new study.

Did google search on Christian art and came across some artwork by one of the young people I worked with at Wydean – here it is. Beautiful. Entitled 'Leaning in'

It's a phrase that had been echoing round my head. Recently, when someone prayed over me about my future they used that

phrase, praying that I would 'lean in to God' and then I read it in my daily prayer notes, twice that week 'Leaning in to God'.

What a wonderful phrase, to lean in to God...speaks of intimacy, comfort, security, a shared love, support, dependency, faith. If leaning, need the thing that you're leaning against to be constant and reliable else fall.

So I want to leave you with that word image.

For to be able to surrender freely to God we need to lean in to him, rely on him, and we can do that wholeheartedly, with the faith of a small boy, a little child, because he is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine.

To him be all glory in the church and in C J through out all generations for ever and ever!