

Dean's Letter, 2 August 2020

Dear Cathedral family, Brothers and Sisters in Christ

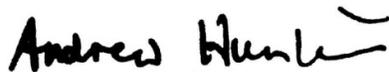
The Christian apologist and author, C S Lewis, described his conversion from atheism to Christianity as being “surprised by joy”. It was encounters with joy in literature and music that awoke in him an overwhelming desire for joy, and led him (in time) to the source of all Joy. It is worth reading and re-reading (as I am currently doing) Lewis’ autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*. There are other images for this life-changing discovery: finding unexpected treasure in a field, or at last coming across the pearl of great price, and selling all that we have to gain that field of treasure, that pearl (Matt 13:44-46). All images of the kingdom of God.

The feeding of the 5000, in today’s Gospel reading (Matthew 14:13-21) points us to another image of Joy, of the kingdom of God: the image of the feast, the wedding banquet, the feast of rich food and good wine (Isaiah 25), the rich food, wine and milk (Isaiah 55). There is immense symbolism in this meal. It is a Eucharistic encounter: Jesus takes the bread, blesses, breaks and gives it to his disciples, who give it to the people. It is the banquet over which Jesus provides. It is a foretaste of the coming of the kingdom of God. It points to the Last Supper when Jesus took bread and the cup of wine, with the words, “this is my body”, “this is my blood”. Jesus satisfies our hunger and thirst for heavenly food, for Joy, for the treasure, the pearl, that makes life worth living.

Covid has propelled us into a far greater awareness of the need to feed people. The food parcels and vouchers that go out every couple of weeks meet a very real need – just as the hungry people were fed by Jesus, in our Gospel reading. People continue to be in need and I am grateful to all who help with food, in any way. We are like those disciples who bring the five loaves and two fish to Jesus: we offer what we have and who we are. Jesus takes us, blesses, breaks and transforms us, and gives us to be life for the world.

The feeding of the 5000 comes immediately after a very different sort of banquet: that of Herod Antipas, at which, in fulfilment of his foolish promise to Salome, he ordered the beheading of John the Baptist (Matt 14:1-12). That banquet was a scene of lust and greed, corrupt and brutal power, the abuse of authority, betrayal and deceit, and ultimately murder – a complete contrast with the compassion and mercy and healing that characterised the feast shared by Jesus. We have in this juxtaposition of these two meals, an invitation to be part of the meal – the way - that leads to life.

My love to you all

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Hunter". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small flourish at the end.