

HEARERS OF THE WORD

Isaiah 55:1-3; Psalm 145 (144); Romans 8:35, 37-49; Matthew 14:13-21

The feeding of the five thousand

Matt. 14:13 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. 14 When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. 15 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." 16 Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." 17 They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." 18 And he said, "Bring them here to me." 19 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. 20 And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. 21 And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

The multiplication of the loaves is recounted six times in the Gospels: twice in Matthew and Mark and once each in Luke and John. The numbers involved vary for symbolic reasons.

	Mark	Matthew	Luke	John
5,000	6:30-44	14:13-21	9:12-17	6:1-13
4,000	8:1-10	15:32-39		

It looks as if all six versions go back to an original account circulating within early Christianity. By the time the tradition is received into Mark's Gospel (the first to be written down), it had already taken on a symbolic meaning, illuminated by biblical echoes and informed by the Eucharistic practice of the church. It is impossible to go behind such a highly

developed tradition to find out "what really happened". However, some lines of interpretation of a moralising tendency are to be avoided, for instance he persuaded all present to share and this is what "really" happened. That might be of itself a kind of miracle (!) but the Gospel writers do mean something deeper than this in their presentation.

For instance, in the 5,000 version, the word "basket" means a Jewish basket; 12 suggests the twelve tribes; the language used echoes that of Moses feeding the people in the desert; perhaps even the number 5 might refer in some way to the Pentateuch. The location is Jewish territory. In the 4,000 version, the word for basket is the ordinary, "secular" one; 7 suggests completeness or fulfilment; the language echoes that of the Elisha/Elijah traditions regarding food; perhaps the number 4 is one less than 5 to allow a certain precedence to the Jews. The location is Gentile territory.

Thus, Mark and Matthew, by means of telling the same tradition in two versions, teach their hearers that Jesus is food for both Jews and Gentiles. It is not accidental that the intervening stories (Matt 15) tell of the abolition of the dietary laws of Judaism, the very laws designed to keep Jew and Gentile apart. It is likewise not accidental that these stories are followed by the profession of faith of Peter (Matt 16): only those who see in faith that Jesus is bread for Jews and Gentiles can really confess the true identity of Jesus. This is probably an on-going issue in the early church—critically at the Eucharist.

The echoes of Moses are important for Matthew's Gospel because his community only recently broke from the mother religion of Judaism and would like to claim for itself the fulfilment of what the Moses traditions pointed to. Thus in our story, like Moses Jesus is in a desert place and feeds the people. In the following stories in Matthew, like Moses Jesus goes up a mountain to pray

Thought for the day

In the Gospels, "compassion" is used in a way which is restricted and instructive. Compassion is used only of Jesus himself or of God in some of the parables. The word itself means something like mercy, arising from deep within, a kind of spontaneous empathy and understanding, the kind of reaction a woman has for the child of her womb. When people are compassionate to us, it is because we need it and usually we are deeply touched and grateful. Such is our God! If we receive such compassion, we are obliged to give it in return, of course. This is the charter of Christian living.

Prayer

God, all merciful and all compassionate, help us to be like you that we may console others with the same consolation with which we ourselves has been consoled.

(14:23), crosses the sea miraculously (14:25), uses the divine name for himself (14:27; "It is I" = YHWH from Exod 3:14).

KIND OF WRITING

This is a miracle story—received in the Gospel tradition as symbolising the deep identity of Jesus and the challenge to practice his inclusivity. The celebration of the Eucharist is precisely a celebration of the Gospel proclamation of the God who loves all without distinction.

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

Moses: In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat. This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Gather as much of it as each of you needs, and

omer to a person according to the number of persons, all providing for those in their own tents.” The Israelites did so, some gathering more, some less. But when they measured it with an omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed. And Moses said to them, “Let no one leave any of it over until morning.” But they did not listen to Moses; some left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and became foul. And Moses was angry with them. Morning by morning they gathered it, as much as each needed; but when the sun grew hot, it melted. (Ex 16:13–21)

Elisha: A man came from Baal-shalishah, bringing food from the first fruits to the man of God: twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. Elisha said, “Give it to the people and let them eat.” But his servant said, “How can I set this before a hundred people?” So he repeated, “Give it to the people and let them eat, for thus says the LORD, ‘They shall eat and have some left.’” He set it before them, they ate, and had some left, according to the word of the LORD. (2 Kings 4:42–44)

NEW TESTAMENT FOREGROUND

When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. “Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one. (Matt 6:7–13)

ST PAUL

I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others. For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. And in this matter I am giving my advice: it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something—now

finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does not have. I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. As it is written, “The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.” (2Cor 8:8–15, echoing Exod 16:18.)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 13 The absurd death of John the Baptist has just been recounted. Jesus needs time to reflect. The withdrawal is brief and comes to an end because people need the presence and teaching of Jesus.

Verse 14 Compassion – a word used only of God, Jesus, the Good Samaritan and the Father of the Prodigal son. It carries a special meaning of deeply felt, natural fellow feeling and pity. Mark has “and he began to teach them many things.” Instead, Matthew chooses to illustrate the compassion by healing.

Verse 15 The preaching day is over; the practical aspects need attention too. The inability of the disciples to help the people may be an echo of Ezekiel 34.

Verse 16 A direct and apparently unreasonable challenge to the disciples.

Verse 17 The meagre quantity may be contrasted at the end with the numbers fed.

Verse 18 Jesus takes charge. There may be an echo of *I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd.* (Ezekiel 34:23)

Verse 19 The language is consciously echoing the Lord’s Supper at this point.

Verse 20 Echoing the feeding in the Moses tradition. The leftovers are greater than the ingredients. Such abundance signifies that the messianic age has come. Cf. *And it will happen at that time that the treasury of manna will come down again from on high, and they will eat of it in those years because these are they who will have arrived at the consummation of time.* (2Baruch

29:8) Twelve is a symbolism of the people of Israel.

Verse 21 The symbolic number is finally expressed.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. The news of the death of John the Baptist prompted Jesus to go off to be alone, but the crowds followed him. Despite his personal sorrow he was able to reach out in compassion to the crowd. Perhaps there have been times when you have put personal preferences and desires to one side in order to reach out to another. What was it like for you when you were able to do this?

2. When Jesus saw the crowd, he recognised their need and reached out to them. Who has been a Jesus person for you, someone who recognised your need and reached out to you? For whom have you been a Jesus person?

3. The scene is a Eucharistic symbol reminding us of the sacred meal to which all believers are invited to receive nourishment from the Lord. How has the Eucharist been a source of nourishment for you?

4. When the disciples became aware of the problem they wanted to send the crowd away but Jesus told them “You give them something to eat”. They thought what they had was insufficient but Jesus used the little they had to feed the crowd. When we give the little we have to a situation the results are often beyond our expectations. Have you had this experience?

5. “Lord, it is an extraordinary thing: if we complain about the little we have, we never have enough; but if we take what we have, raise our eyes to heaven, and say the blessing over it, we have as much as we want, and even twelve baskets of scraps of leftovers.” *Michel de Verteuil*

PRAYER

Bountiful and compassionate God, you place in the hands of your disciples the food of life.

Nourish us at your holy table, that we may bear Christ to others and share with them the gifts we have so richly received.

We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord

Rom 8:31 *What then shall we say about these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 Indeed, he who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, freely give us all things? 33 Who will bring any charge against God's elect? Is it God, who justifies? 34 Who is the one who will condemn? Is it Christ, the one who died (and more than that, he was raised), who is at the right hand of God, and who also is interceding for us.*

Rom 35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will trouble, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? 36 *As it is written, "For your sake we encounter death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered."* 37 No, in all these things we have complete victory through him who loved us! 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor heavenly rulers, nor things that are present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (NET adjusted; see note below)

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

If, by some misadventure, the entire New Testament were to disappear and if, by some miracle, one had the choice to keep one page, then that page should really be Romans 8. It builds on the past saving events in Christ, it explores the future cosmic dimensions of the faith and at the same time stays very close to the present experiences of believers.

The key, of course, is the role given to the Spirit. All of Romans 8 should be read again...it would even be good to read all of Romans 5-8 or at the very least to take out Romans 5:1-5 (see below).

In the text above, the preceding verses have been added and some of the sentences have been adjusted to read as questions. Many, thought not all, scholars agree with this; it makes sense to me.

KIND OF WRITING

The overall pattern in Romans 8 has been:

- 8:1-17 The Spirit and life
- 8:18-30 The Spirit and hope

8:31-39 God's irrevocable love in Jesus

Our text comes from the final, jubilant doxology which concludes the magnificent chapter 8. Romans 8 is really poetry should be read as such. Paul is hoping to instruct the minds but even more to touch, to lift up the hearts of the Roman believers. The pile-up of rhetorical questions lends great energy to the writing.

Joseph Fitzmyer, in his commentary on Romans, offers the following map of these closing verses:

- a. 8:31a Opening rhetorical question
- b. 8:31b-32: God who is for us
- c. 8:33-34 God and Christ for us
- d. 8:35-37 Who can separate us?
- e. 8:38-39 Nothing can separate us!

Technically, this is a peroration and the ancient teachers of rhetoric noted that the peroration should include the following functions:

- 1. To gain the attention of the hearers once again.
- 2. To summarise (*enumeratio*), synthesising in the preceding arguments.
- 3. To touch the emotions (*amplificatio*) as the seat of enduring recollection.

All three roles are richly present here.

CONTEXT IN THE COMMUNITY

The context in the Roman Christian house churches is precisely separation, a division between those of Jewish and Gentile origin. Throughout Romans 5-8, Paul has been at pains to lay before the believers in Rome all the tremendous gifts they have in common: salvation, faith, baptism, the Christian way, the struggle with evil and the final victory won by Christ and established in the hearts of the faithful by the Holy Spirit within. This latter has been the great theme of Romans 8 as such.

RELATED PASSAGES

The disclosure of God's mercy

But now apart from the law the righteousness of God (although it is attested by the law and the prophets) has been disclosed—namely, the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, for all have sinned and fall

short of the glory of God. But they are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. God publicly displayed him at his death as the mercy seat accessible through faith. This was to demonstrate his righteousness, because God in his forbearance had passed over the sins previously committed. This was also to demonstrate his righteousness in the present time, so that he would be just and the justifier of the one who lives because of Jesus' faithfulness. (Romans 3:21-26)

The gifts of faith, hope and love

Therefore, since we have been declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have also obtained access into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in the hope of God's glory. Not only this, but we also rejoice in sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance, character, and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Romans 5:1-5)

Our need of help

So, I find the law that when I want to do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God in my inner being. But I see a different law in my members waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. (Romans 7:21-25)

God's gifts in Jesus and the Spirit

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the life-giving Spirit in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. For God achieved what the law could not do because it was weakened through the flesh. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and concerning sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the righteous requirement of the law may be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:1-4)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 31 Paul engages his hearers by the use of "we" and rhetorical questions. *These things:* Paul is casting his mind back to Romans 8:18-30, as well as all of

Romans 5-8. In this way, a summary glance back over the arguments is achieved. The rhetorical questions require no answers. Paul's teaching is always highly theocentric and so he beings with God.

Verse 32 The giving up of his own Son — and echo of Abraham and Isaac — takes us to many passages in Paul. None is more eloquent than Romans 3:21-26, in the NET translation. The force of the argument is *a fortiori*: if this much, how much more! The phrase translated “freely give” is a verb in Greek (*charizomai*) based on the noun *charis* meaning grace or gift. This is the only use of the verb in Romans. The noun, however, occurs no fewer than 24 times, across all of Romans (Rom 1:5, 7; 3:24; 4:4, 16; 5:2, 15, 17, 20-6:1; 6:14-15, 17; 7:25; 11:5-6; 12:3, 6; 15:15; 16:20). Paul's experience and teaching is that all is really gift, grace and favour. This time, “all things” point us forward towards the end-time consummation.

Verse 33 This is the language of the court room, echoing the closing verses of Romans 7. We could think of Job 1-2 or Zechariah 3. Paul alludes to the Suffering Servant: *The one who vindicates me is close by. Who dares to argue with me? Let us confront each other! Who is my accuser? Let him challenge me! Look, the Sovereign LORD helps me. Who dares to condemn me? Look, all of them will wear out like clothes; a moth will eat away at them.* (Isaiah 50:8-9) The God who justifies is the real theme of Romans from start to finish — so one word has to do duty for the whole letter. This phrase really has to be a question: “Is it God, who justifies?” Cf. *Since God is one, he will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.* (Romans 3:30)

Verse 34 We are still in a forensic setting, even if the verb to condemn is not that frequent in Romans. The phrase is best read as another rhetorical question. Christ is then described with four descriptors, moving from the past events of salvation to the present reality. Starting with the death and resurrection of Jesus, Paul makes a rare mention of his exaltation at the right hand of God (in Luke's world, this would be the ascension). Having achieved all that for us, he is now interceding for us — given all that, Jesus is certainly not the one to condemn us! Earlier, the Spirit was mentioned as interceding for us (8:27) and now it is the turn of Christ (8:34; see also 11:2). These are the only uses of interceding in the seven undisputed letters.

Still within the Pauline tradition, such

intercession becomes the major theme of the Letter to the Hebrews, even if the verb is rare there too. See: *And the others who became priests were numerous, because death prevented them from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently since he lives forever. So he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.* (Hebrews 7:23-25)

Verse 35 The question of separation is a hint at the presenting issues in the Roman house churches. “Love of Christ” means here the love Christ has for us. The exact expression is rare. The only other occurrence as a noun is: *For the love of Christ controls us, since we have concluded this, that Christ died for all; therefore all have died.* (2 Corinthians 5:14) In the form of a verb, Paul clearly affirms that Christ loves him in Galatians, where we read: *I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So the life I now live in the body, I live because of the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* (Galatians 2:20)

The various troubles are mentioned elsewhere as to be expected. *We sent Timothy, our brother and fellow worker for God in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen you and encourage you about your faith, so that no one would be shaken by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this.* (1 Thessalonians 3:2-3) Such things are as nothing compared to the glory to be revealed. Cf. *Then we who are alive, who are left, will be suddenly caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord.* (1 Thessalonians 4:17)

Verse 36 The citation is from Psalm 44: *Yet because of you we are killed all day long; we are treated like sheep at the slaughtering block.* (Psalm 44:22) So, all along and even before Christ, faithfulness to God came at a price. In the Old Testament, the faithfulness of YHWH grounded the continued faithfulness of the Israelite. This faithfulness has now been demonstrated in an extraordinary way in the death and resurrection of Jesus. *But now apart from the law the righteousness of God (although it is attested by the law and the prophets) has been disclosed — namely, the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who believe.* (Romans 3:21-22)

Verse 37 Literally, the text reads “we are super-victors.” Cf. *But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!* (1 Corinthians 15:57) Once more, the agency of the love from Christ

is underlined (the love from God come up in final verse).

Verses 38-39 Paul opens the last phrases with a statement of personal conviction. The forces we content with are in various categories: death and life (natural “events”); angels and heavenly rulers (spirits of different ranks); present and future (time is personified globally); powers (still other spirits); height and depth (cosmic forces, perhaps to do with astrology). *Nor anything else in all creation:* thus, the believer is comprehensively protected by *the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord*. As similarly global conviction come up in chapter 10: *But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we preach), because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* (Romans 10:8-9)

This resounding ending frames the whole section, Romans 5-8: *Not only this, but we also rejoice in sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance, character, and hope. And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.* (Romans 5:3-5)

Pointers for prayer

1. This tremendous conviction of Paul may seem daunting in its comprehensiveness. Yet, in my own smaller way, perhaps I have had such a sense of confidence in God and Christ.
2. The cascade of challenges mentioned in these verses may help me to name whatever disturbs my own faith or causes me distress. What would my list include?
3. The love of Christ for me: when has that been really real in my own experience? What were the circumstances? Did the experience “stay” with me as part of my story of discipleship?
4. The sense that nothing *whatsoever* can rock the person of faithful provides a firm foundation for graced living. Do I have the feeling of being set free to be a person of faith, of hope and of love?

PRAYER

God ever loving, we thank you for the disclosure of your love in Jesus' death and resurrection. You have poured your love into our hearts through the Spirit. Help us embrace these astonishing gifts that we may live what we have received and be your children in name and in fact. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

You that have no money, come, buy and eat

Is. 55:1 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.
2 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.
3 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.
4 See, *I made him a witness to the peoples,*
a leader and commander for the peoples.
5 *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.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

This short passage is well chosen to match the Gospel story because of its direct appeal. Hitherto the text has addressed Jerusalem or God's Servant, Darius. Now, however, the address is widened and the crowds stand for the nations (55:5), peoples (56:7) or humankind (65:2).

KIND OF WRITING

Apart from being a good example of biblical poetry, the genre is much discussed. Does it echo the invitation to a meal typical of Lady Wisdom? Is it a conscious evocation of a street vendor's cry? Within the larger context of Isaiah 55-56, our excerpt has a clear outline:

55:1-2 invitation to all to go to Jerusalem
55:3 The purpose of the feast
55:4 Looking back to David as ensign
55:5 Looking forward to the people's new role, taking David's place.

Eventually, it becomes clear that the Temple is open to all peoples and that God gathering more than just Israelites to Jerusalem.

ORIGIN OF THE READING

Isaiah 55 both closes Second Isaiah (40-55) and forms a bridge to Third Isaiah (56-66). To get the full power of the passage, read Is 55:1-56:8. Our passage has a specific new and surprising message. Because the monarchy failed so spectacularly, God transfers his promise from David to the whole people. It is not too

much to speak of a democratisation of God's faithfulness. Something similar happens to the priesthood in Is 61:5-6.

RELATED PASSAGES

For the widening of the invitation

And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it, and hold fast my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. Thus says the Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather others to them besides those already gathered. (Isaiah 56:6-8; cf. Isaiah 66:22-23)

For the ancient promise to David

See 2 Samuel 7:12-16.

Democratisation of the priesthood

See Isaiah 61:5-6.

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 1 The address "ho" or "hail" marks a new start. The vocabulary of the street vendor may be overheard, as in Prov 9:1, 3-6. This particular invitation is balanced by v. 6 a little later: *Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near.* (Isaiah 55:6)

The first invitation in v.1a is straightforward. The second (v.1b) is paradoxical: those with no money are invited to buy.

In the third moment (v.1c), not only do the buyers have no money but the merchandise is priceless, literally.

Verse 2a This is a rhetorical address and carries an implied assessment of behaviour. Hitherto, people have been wasting their money on what only apparently satisfies.

Verses 2b-3 In response to the question in v.2a, a series of imperatives (listen, eat, delight, incline, come, listen) leads first to a purpose clause (so that you may live) and finally to a restatement of the ancient promise of God's fidelity to David and his house. The big difference here is that Second Isaiah transfers this hope from David to the people as a whole. Cf. *You have renounced the covenant with your servant; you have defiled his crown in the dust.* (Psalms 89:39)

God's unconditional election and love are the basis for hope of salvation. Unlike the covenant with Moses which was conditional upon obedience, here God's sovereign grace alone establishes this everlasting covenant. Cf. *"By the way that he came, by the same he shall return; he shall not come into this city, says the LORD. For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David."* (Isaiah 37:34-35) Again, unlike the promise to David, this renewal is no longer tied to one "royal" family. The extended promise is reflected the additional verses 5-6 above. For Second Isaiah's understanding of the monarchy, see. Is 42:1-9; 60:1-22 and 65:25. V. 3b marks the transfer of the covenant with David.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. In a culture of distraction / busy-ness, it can be hard to recognise the hungers of the heart, our desire for something more. When did you become personally aware of and engaged with your own inner needs and desires?

2. Often we allow ourselves to be taken in by things which do not really satisfy. Our culture really does tell us that "that's all there is" and don't fool yourself into looking for something more meaningful. It can be hard to resist and stay faithful. The journey inwards is the journey home.

PRAYER

Loving and gracious God, you open wide your hand and grant the desires of all who live. Draw us to yourself that we may know who we are and that only in you do we live and move and have our being.

THE LITURGY

Isaiah 55:1-3; Psalm 145 (144); Romans 8:35, 37-49; Matthew 14:13-21

READINGS 1 AND 3

In the first reading, the prophet alerts people to their unrecognised hungers of the heart. In the Gospel, the disciples point to the unrecognised ordinary hungers of the people.

THE RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Psalm 145 (144) is an alphabetical psalm, uniquely carrying the title “praise, hymn” (*ḥillā*). It belongs to a type of psalm which celebrates the motifs of God’s majesty and grace. These motifs are then a basis for praise. The link backwards to Isaiah and forward to Matthew is clear: *You open wide your hand, grant the desires of all who live.*

SUNDAY INTRODUCTIONS

First reading

Isaiah 55:1-3

Our reading is an invitation, an appeal, to recognise deeper hungers and not to be satisfied with what only apparently meets our needs. This invitation is grounded in God’s unconditional love.

Second reading

Romans 8:35, 37-39

The great chapter 8 of the letter to the Romans comes to a resounding conclusion in these confident and inspiring words. In the end, nothing, nothing whatsoever, nothing at all can separate us from the love of God in Jesus.

Gospel

Matthew 14:13-21

Our Gospel story today—the multiplications of the loaves—is not meant to be a once-off miracle in the past to excite wonder. Instead, it is an invitation today to know our inner hungers and to come to God, who opens wide his hand to us all.

WEEKDAY INTRODUCTIONS

Monday 3 August

Jeremiah 28:1-17

In critical times, there can be prophets who tell us what we want to hear. This was true in the past, as we hear in this

gripping story of contrasting “words of the Lord.” Jeremiah is steadfast as usual.

Matthew 14:22-36

The Gospels as a whole were written in the light of Easter and to proclaim the resurrection. This is true of the walking on the water. In this case, we are to understand that the risen, living Lord is with his church always, no matter what storms and tempests we face.

Tuesday 4 August

St John Mary Vianney, priest

Jeremiah 30:1-2, 12-15, 18-22

A double message marks this passage from Isaiah, weal and woe or rather the other way around. Yes, the disaster of the Exile brought about tremendous destruction. No, God’s love has never been taken away.

Matthew 15:1-2, 10-14

A very sharp dispute... and not without echoes in church tradition!

Wednesday 5 August

Jeremiah 31:1-7

The second part of Jeremiah is full of surprising and abundant consolation. Nowhere is this more evident than in these lines today, “I have loved you with an everlasting love, so I am constant in my affection for you.” It was good news for the exiles; it is good news for us today.

Matthew 15:21-28

The story of the Canaanite woman is remarkable on several counts. First of all, a woman *teaches* Jesus. Secondly, Matthew underlines that Jesus came “only for the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” This exception anticipates the Gentile mission, found at the close of this Gospel.

Thursday 6 August

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14

Our reading takes us to the heavenly court. It uses a key phrase: one like a son of man, used by Jesus about himself. The ending of the reading is very like the ending of Matthew’s Gospel: *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.* (Matthew 28:18)

2 Peter 1:16-19

Is the Christian proclamation just stories or “clever myths”? Emphatically not, according to this reading. Jesus was a real historical person about whom believers hold well-grounded beliefs. The last sentence in the reading is very uplifting: *take [prophecy] as a lamp for lighting a way through the dark until the dawn comes and the morning star rises in your minds.*

Matthew 17:1-9

Matthew reads the Transfiguration as an apocalyptic vision — clear from his editorial work.

Friday 7 August

Sts Sixtus II and companions, martyrs

Nahum 2:1, 3, 3:1-3, 6-7

This is an amazing reading and needs to be listened to very carefully. The first part is a promise of restoration—to Jerusalem. The second part—very graphic—is a promise of retribution to Nineveh. Nineveh, the Assyrian capital, was indeed destroyed in 612 BC.

Matthew 16:24-28

This is the scene just before the Transfiguration in Matthew. Thus, the fierce challenge is a prelude to the guidance and reassurance in chapter 17.

Saturday 8 August

St Dominic, priest and religious

Habakkuk 1:12-2:4

Habakkuk confronts the challenge of believing in a just God and living in an unjust world. In fact, he sounds quite like a prophetic version of Job! There is a specific enemy: the Chaldeans. Habakkuk brings this evident injustice to the attention of God, hoping for a reply. Where is God in all this? The last, familiar line is quoted by Paul in Romans 1:18.

Matthew 17:14-20

Our Gospel today is really about ministry. The apostles were indeed already sent out to do as Jesus had done: *Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness.* (Matthew 10:1) Such continuation of the ministry cannot be done without a deep and constant faith.