

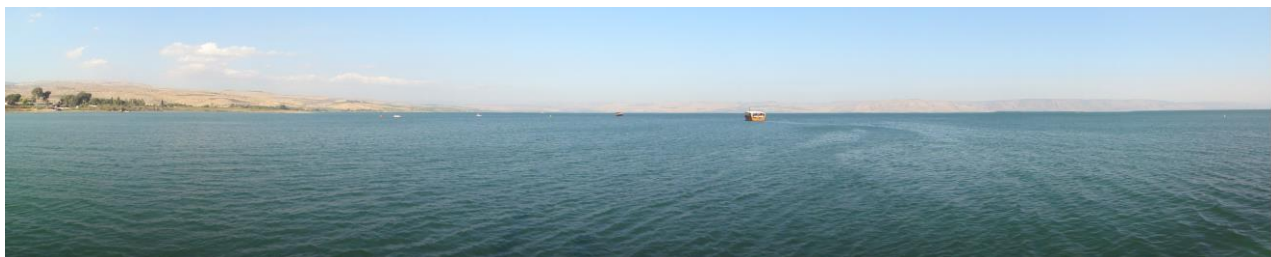
BEING WITH JESUS Sunday 24th Jan, 2016 at Leith Valley

I saw the gift to me in visiting Israel as my opportunity to practice being with Jesus in the land in which he walked and ministered. They say in Israel that the land is like the 5th Gospel. It adds another dimension to the words we read. As you go there you are able to experience the Bible through its physical context as though in 3D. And it is very much a Jewish/Israel context in which the Bible is set. Jesus was Jewish and he lived and ministered among a peculiar people whose life and culture was in this land.



And the topography, geography and culture gives a whole new dimension to the flat words written on paper. This has little to do with going to the religious sites which have been built over traditional areas for some sort of magical connection. In most cases the actual site is unrecognizable for the elaborate church and accompanying symbology. But what I experienced is the 'thin' place where I had a sense of what had taken place here and how this was connected to the physical land and water and the people and Jesus.

The Sea of Kinneret and the surrounding countryside is one such place in the northern region of Galilee. Kinneret is the Hebrew name for the freshwater lake that is 5.5 miles wide and 9 miles long. We stayed in Tiberius above the lake at Poriye Elit.



This is the region in which Jesus calls the disciples from fishing on the lake to being fishers of men. In the countryside he will feed the 5000 and then the 4000. He will preach the sermon on the Mt of the Beatitudes. He will appear again to the disciples who were out fishing and had caught nothing and prepare a meal for them on the beach shore of the Lake.

Reading 1 Matthew 4:18-22

So much of the Gospel story will take place here and exact spots are confirmed via the archaeological ruins that they have found. The Jesus Boat is one such relic discovered by accident when the Lake was very low and extracted from the mud via a very delicate process lest it should disintegrate. It has been carbon dated to around the very era in which Jesus lived and thus is a very good example of the type of boat these men used, suited to drag netting.



This boat is made of 11 types of wood, mostly oak and cedar, but patched and repaired among others with carob, sycamore, hawthorn, laurel, willow and judastree.

This next boat is more disappointing but for a fee you can experience what it is like to sail on the Lake of Kinneret.



In Israel there is a story told that when God was creating the world he had two bags of rocks to distribute. One bag he spread over the entire world and the other over the Land of Israel. There are a lot of rocks!! No sand, just rocks and dust.

This morning I invite you to remember again

the rock from which you are hewn as you were called to follow Jesus.

Jesus called the disciples to follow him from the mundane and ordinary task of fishing.

And in the following to leave behind their former life. To lay down their nets may be a symbol of a former life they needed to forsake in order to bind themselves to Jesus and become his. This call meant not only leaving livelihood but also family- their father Zebedee and familiar territory- the shores of the lake. Our call is no different. To follow Jesus is to leave behind the trappings of a former way of life and being.

I invite you to consider what you may yet have to leave behind.

We focus a little bit more on the feeding of the 5000. This event took place at **Tabgha**.

In the Holy Land the name Tabgha is given to a district about three kilometers from Capernaum, extending inland from the shore of Lake Gennesareth. More specifically, it denotes a small part of this district: the place where our Lord multiplied five loaves and two fishes into enough to feed a crowd of five thousand men.

It is close to the lake-shore, in an uninhabited area where there was plenty of grass.



Reading 2 Mark 6:30-44

At Tabgha, a church commemorating this event is quite lovely and fascinating, particularly for its simplicity. The church was recently the target of arson and so some of the mosaics and particularly the site of the rock were barred to tourists, but here are a few photos.

In the case of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, they venerated the exact rock on which the loaves and fishes had been placed by our Lord. The



archaeological work confirmed the accuracy of the tradition that had been handed down, by bringing to light the remains of the altar, the venerable rock which showed that numerous fragments had been removed from it, and a mosaic of a basket of loaves flanked by two fishes. It may date from the fifth or sixth century. With its simple lines and the warm colour of the mosaic tesserae, it is powerfully evocative; anyone who has read the Gospel instantly grasps the

event that it recalls.

Who is this man we follow? In the story of the feeding of the 5000 we see something more of the person and nature of Jesus as recorded by Mark. I invite you to remember who it is that you follow as we look more closely at this story.

1. We first of all notice a need for time off.

³⁰ *The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught.*

³¹ *Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and **get some rest.**”³² So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.*



I love this aspect of Jesus. He takes time off regularly and he tries to instill this into his followers. We would do well to hear and obey this in 2016. Come with me, He says.

My quiet place above the Lake. In the early morning before it got too hot.

2. Jesus had compassion:

Unfortunately for Jesus and the disciples

their escape doesn't turn out well, for the crowds seeing them leave race around the lake and beat them to the solitary place.

But we don't see Jesus telling them to go away...more like my reaction, on the contrary something is deeply stirred within him.

³⁴ *When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.*

They too needed a quiet place to rest their souls. They too needed safe and effective leadership. They too needed companionship along the way and refreshing from the heart of God. A Shepherd to provide and care for them. They too were spiritually empty

and desperate for a Saviour. So he teaches them. How much I too need compassion for the crowds.

3. the miraculous.

Finally it gets late and the crowds having run here from surrounding towns came unprepared with food to eat. The disciples tell Jesus to dismiss the crowds so they can go and eat. But Jesus has other plans.

“You give them something to eat.”

How would you have responded to this? Theirs was a very pragmatic one. *They said to him, “That would take more than half a year’s wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?”*

Their spiritual mind was really not functioning at this point and wouldn’t for a while. They were slow to see and apprehend the full meaning of who was in their midst, despite having already seen miracles and even done ministry themselves. They were still thinking along the lines of the natural...this is just a man, astounding but nevertheless a man like us.

*³⁸ “How many loaves do you have?” he asked. “Go and see.” When they found out, they said, “Five—and two fish.” ³⁹ Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on **the green grass.** ⁴⁰ So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties.*

It’s likely to be spring as the grass is green and near Passover time. **The next thing that Jesus does is astounding.** A complete surprise to all who witness it. It’s not in their frame of reference.



Imagine you were sitting there on the green grass, the sun is going down, you have listened and heard things you never knew before because you are in the presence of Jesus. Perhaps you had been so caught up in the power of the man’s words and his very presence that you didn’t realise you were hungry.

⁴¹ Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. ⁴² They all ate and were satisfied, ⁴³ and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish.

Jesus gave thanks for the bread and the fish before breaking it, an echo in every Jewish mind of the Passover ritual but also a prequel of an event to come.

At the end all the people had more than enough to eat and were satisfied, both times significant amounts of food were left over. God’s grace is always more than generous.

His love overflowed giving us a powerful example of the breaking in of the Kingdom of God through Jesus.

What will we take from this?

COME AWAY WITH ME

This is ever the call of Jesus to the heart. Be with me. Remember whose you are. Enjoy the solitude of being with me. Jesus will reveal Himself to you in the heart space. In you and me is a holy place, a temple, not made with human hands but a work of the Spirit. This place is built as we talk and as you participate in the body and blood of Jesus and in fellowship, in serving and suffering, in rejection and persecution and in joy and abundance. It is from within that there comes a searing or sealing to Jesus, a separation within the heart that finds its being or rationale in being with Jesus.

2. LOOK FOR THE GOD DIMENSION

The situation in this story was impossible in the natural.

Feed them with 5 loaves and 2 fish. Are you crazy?

But you see Jesus was seeing this from the perspective of heaven and the resources of His Father.

What does it mean to have the mind of Christ?

You know you have the mind of Christ when *the impossible seems logical. And this was logical to Jesus... 'you feed them'.*

A definition of the mind of Christ from Bill Johnson:

- the ability to process life from an eternal, timeless and multi-dimensional perspective
- the ability to think supernaturally and

perceive the natural world through infinite possibilities and limitless resources that transcends the laws of physics and the restrictions of physical realities.

When the impossible looks logical.

We inhabit a physical body but we have a spiritual nature but our first call is usually to what we can figure out.

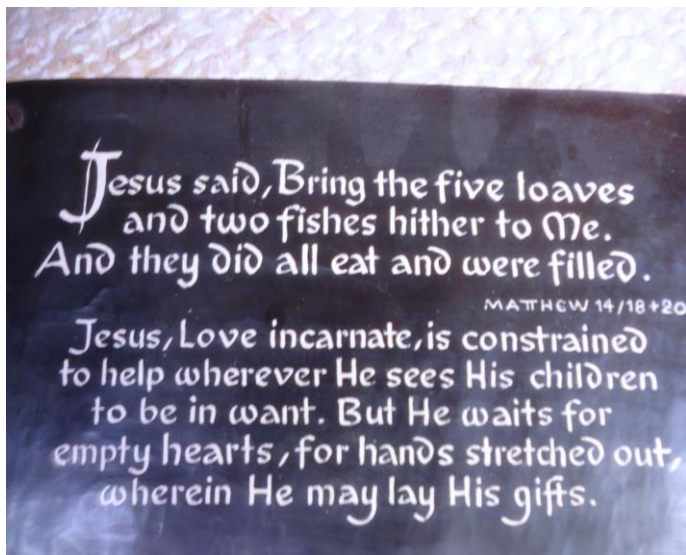
But a God perspective will see us believing that the miraculous can break into our human dimension.

The Kingdom of God is breaking in to our dimension- people see Jesus spontaneously and are converted from Islam, angels are discernible, impossible mountains can be moved by asking for supernatural help.

When we don't have the answers or the resources, or a way forward, what is required of me is to ask for help.

The loaf, until it's broken is whole, self contained.

My problem sits here until it's opened up, pulled apart and offered with thanks to God



It's not something you can fix in the natural or with logical thinking. Look for the supernatural dimension to be added to your problem or dilemma. Ask for supernatural help. Jesus I need help! Then the multiplication can take place. There's a spiritual answer to your problem you may not be considering because you are working hard on trying to solve it yourself. There is so much of God breaking into this world we are not even seeing because we are not looking and not attuned.

I invite whatever it is you can't see a solution for today, offer it to the Father with thanks to be broken and the ordinary made extraordinary.

COMMUNION

We come to the table this morning with this story of provision and God's perspective in our minds.

If you look carefully you'll see that this miracle is sandwiched in as part of a much bigger picture, all to do with the wonderful provision of God for all people and all time. These include the Passover, see Exodus 12, the miracle of manna in the wilderness when the Israelites were fed over and over again, see Exodus 16, then the feeding of the 5000 and the 4000 and Jesus announcement that he was the Bread of Life in John 6:35, the Last Supper, see Mark 14 and the parable of the Great Banquet, Luke 14:15-24, to which everyone is invited. As John says in ch 6 Jesus already had in mind what he was going to do when he asked the disciples where they were going to get bread from for the people to eat.

The communion cup and plate come from Hebron and celebrate the mosaic of the loaves and fish. It's handpainted.

But why are there only 4 loaves on the mosaic?



The mosaic of the loaves and fishes in front of the altar shows only four loaves. The intention of the designer cannot be known for certain, but the Benedictines in charge of the shrine give a theological explanation to

pilgrims today: the missing fifth loaf is to be found on the altar, during Holy Mass: it is the Eucharist. Indeed, Christian faith has always seen the gift of the Sacrament of Holy Communion as prefigured in the miraculous multiplication of the loaves and fishes. This link is shown especially clearly in the Gospel of St John, who completes the account of the miraculous multiplication of the loaves and fishes with the story of what happened next. The narrative takes up the whole of the sixth chapter. When Jesus came to Capernaum the next day people questioned him about how he got there.

He said to them:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which

endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you; for on him has God the Father set his seal" (Jn 6: 26-27).

So begins the discourse about the Bread of Life in ch 6, in which our Lord reveals the mystery of the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the gift that Jesus makes of himself...the Bread of life given for us, life laid down for our salvation and ultimate wholeness. In the Eucharist everything is summed up, a container of all that God has done.

As we come to celebrate this meal today let us read and respond together to some of the words from John 6.

³⁵ Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

All: You are the bread of life

⁴⁰ My Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day." ⁴⁷ Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life.

All: : We look to You and believe in You, Jesus Christ the Giver of Eternal Life

⁵³ Jesus said "Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.

ALL: We eat and drink to remember Who we follow and in the hope of resurrection to eternal life.

Let us pray:

We give thanks to you, God our Father for your provision for all of humankind and the creation before the foundation of the world.

We give thanks that in the gift of Jesus, your Son as the Bread of Life we may eat and be satisfied:

- In Christ our sin is passed over and accounted for.
- In Christ our spiritual nature is awakened and renewed.
- In Christ our physical needs are met and we are healed.
- In Christ we have assurance of eternal life and the hope of future resurrection.
- In Christ we are not alone but now we belong to the family of God and enjoy fellowship with one another and with God who is Immanuel, Christ with us.

Truly Jesus, You are enough and we are blessed beyond measure.

Amen

And so we come to participate in this meal,

Not by good deeds, or good ideas and cleverness

Nor do we come by paying for our food and drink.

We come by accepting the miracle provided for us and by knowing our inability to provide for ourselves.

We thus place our trust and hope in the person of Jesus, the Son of God who has provided enough for now and always.

And so it was that on the night Jesus was betrayed

²² While they were eating,
Jesus took bread,
and when he had given thanks,
he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying,
“Take it; this is my body.”

²³ Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it.

²⁴ “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,” he said to them.

²⁵ “Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

**We take this meal by dipping the bread in the cup.
All are welcome at this table, nothing qualifies you but the love of God for all.
Come eat, drink and be satisfied.**