

**(2 Kings 4:42-44; Ephesians 3:14-21; John 6:1-21)**

*Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming towards him, Jesus said to Philip, 'Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?' He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, 'Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.' One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, 'There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?' Jesus said, 'Make the people sit down.' Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, 'Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.' So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, 'This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.'*

*When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.*

*When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, got into a boat, and started across the lake to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The lake became rough because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the lake and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. But he said to them, 'It is I; do not be afraid.' Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land towards which they were going.*

Well, in that one reading we heard about two consecutive miracles, performed in what seemed to be contrasting weather conditions! As we shelter from today's rain (with strong winds forecast for later...), we think back to the contrasting hot sunshine we were enjoying just a few days ago.

So when we imagine the 5,000-strong crowd sitting down on the grass to eat, I wonder whether in our mind's eye the grass is *green* or *brown*! And as we imagine Jesus walking on the water amidst a howling gale, do we recognise in his words to the disciples that awesome phrase 'I am'? Jesus uses that phrase another seven times in John's gospel, and each occasion echoes what God had said to Moses at the burning bush. Moses had asked God his name and the mysterious reply was, '*I am who I am*'.

So in John's gospel, when Jesus says 'I am' he is indicating his divinity – emphasised here when he adds, 'Do not be afraid'. We see this phrase often in the Bible when a divine being first appears to a human being. John emphasises further the divinity of Jesus by linking the 'I am' sayings with miracles, or 'signs' as he calls them. For example, it is just after the feeding of the five thousand that Jesus says, 'I am the bread of life'. We heard in our first reading that the prophet Elisha was able to feed a hundred people from twenty loaves, but John helps us see that Jesus was 'more than a prophet'!

As I am sure you will agree, having been journeying through Mark's gospel for the last few weeks it is good to be visiting John's gospel today – to see afresh the contrast between the two. You may have noticed that last week's gospel passage, from Mark chapter 6, missed out a whole chunk of that chapter. The chunk in question involved the feeding of the five thousand and Jesus walking on the water! Now Mark is as capable of showing Jesus' divinity as John, but sometimes a contrasting literary style can help us reflect on this awesome truth.

Remember what John writes at the end of his gospel: 'Now Jesus did many other *signs* in the presence of his disciples, but these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name'.

And on that same theme, when Jesus says 'I am the good shepherd', he also says 'I came that they may have life and have it abundantly'.

I mentioned Moses and the burning bush just now. As you may have heard this week, Bishop Nick in his Thought for the Day on Radio 4 was reflecting on the devastating wild-fires in Greece. In considering their sheer scale and destructiveness he explored the headline writers' use of the word 'biblical'. Although he did not use the word 'apocalyptic' he suggested the headline writers were alluding to events at the end of the world. Bishop Nick wanted to convey a message of hope and not despair for those affected by the fires; he spoke of 'newness after loss', and of the need for compassion for those who suffer to 'burn in the hearts of spectators'. In essence, Bishop Nick was reminding us that abundant life is always God's will for all.

I might just add that whilst the contemporary understanding of the word 'apocalypse' concerns the end-times, what is ironically the Greek root of that word in fact concerns a disclosure or 'revelation'. Indeed, the best-known example of 'apocalyptic literature' is of course the Book of Revelation.

Now Bishop Nick was speaking just after a disclosure or revealing of news that will affect us in this part of the world. Last Tuesday, it was announced that our Archdeacon, Beverley Mason, is to become the next Bishop of Warrington. Her consecration will take place in October and as Bishop Nick has said elsewhere she will go with our thanks, love and prayers. We pray also for Bev's eventual successor, and perhaps we dare hope for a period of continuity in contrast to the last eleven years which have seen five Archdeacons of Richmond and Craven!

Included in the publicity surrounding Archdeacon Bev's appointment was a short video of a conversation between Bev and her new boss Paul Bayes, the Bishop of Liverpool. Seeing this video reminded me of a recent conversation I had with a bishop – our own Bishop John here at Cafe Church! I for one am grateful that Cafe Church is not also a film studio!

In the same way that it is useful to contrast the literary styles of the gospels of Mark and John so it is helpful sometimes to look beyond our own Diocese and into another. Through that video of Archdeacon Bev in conversation with Bishop Paul it is possible to see how the Diocese of Liverpool is seeking to enable people to grow spiritually. The Diocesan vision is centred on discipleship, advocating a Rule of Life in which Christians are called to 'pray, read, and learn', and sent to 'tell, serve, and give'. Being so called and so sent is not intended to be onerous but *life-giving*: as disciples we follow the Good Shepherd who said, 'I came that they may have life and have it abundantly'.

Perhaps these insights can help us to see afresh how our own Diocesan vision, in which we are 'Loving, Living, Learning', can help us grow spiritually. Those three words are deliberately chosen as 'doing words' indicating that discipleship is active rather than passive. If you and I can draw up for ourselves a Rule of Life which involves – in a way that works for us – 'praying, reading, learning', and 'telling, serving and giving' then we will grow towards the abundant life which is God's will for each of us.

In the words of St Paul, from our second reading,  
'To him who by the power at work within us  
is able to accomplish abundantly far more than we can ask or imagine,  
to him be glory ... for ever and ever'.  
Amen.