

Sunday 2 August 2020

Eighth Sunday after Trinity

Homily

“We are all in the same boat” it’s a phrase that we heard quite a lot at the beginning of lockdown. We are all having to stay at home, work from home if you can, go out to shop and for daily exercise but that’s it – stay at home, we are all in the same boat. Of course we soon realised that some of us were in better equipped boats than others. Some of our boats had gardens and plenty of room inside too. Other people had boats that were small and many floors up with no outside space. We certainly weren’t all in the same boat.

But this phrase, “we are all in the same boat” came to me as I read the beginning of our gospel reading.

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.

What had Jesus just heard? It seems likely that it was the news of the death of John the Baptist, his cousin. So Jesus is shocked and grieving and also, considering his own position as he knows there are those who are opposing him too. Should he withdraw completely, what is he to do?

But the people follow him and they too are struggling with the harsh realities of life, perhaps upset and grieving, certainly ill. And Jesus had compassion on them: because we are all in the same boat – life is at times harsh and complicated.

What Jesus shows to those who followed him was that he understood, he stepped out of his own pain and saw theirs and he helped them. He shows them too that in God’s provision there is a joyful abundance of good things. As we heard in our reading from Isaiah – Everyone come, buy and eat! Listen to me I will provide what is good and nourishing for you and there is enough for everyone. This sense of abundance Jesus shows in the feeding of the thousands of people – there is enough and more besides.

And so we are brought from our imagining of the scene on that lakeside in Galilee, as the words and actions of Jesus echo through the centuries, to our worship today as we gather for the Eucharist we take bread, bless it and break it to share and to satisfy our spiritual hunger. And our Eucharist’s these days seem strange and perhaps not as joyful as we would like – we feel constrained by the way we need to do things at this time. But in the bread that we take and God blesses, and that we share we have a full and complete feast, a heavenly banquet, it is an abundance.

So in this story that echoes our Eucharist this morning we see God’s overriding compassion and the abundance of God’s provision for us.

And yet I must confess that quite often I find it hard to feel that message – I kind of know it in my head, but my heart is broken because I know there are so many people whose boat, as it were, is far from seaworthy, who don't even have enough to make the next move to make life a little more secure and comfortable and that's locally, not far away, and what is it to them that God's abundance is sufficient and there is enough for everyone.

We live in such a broken world where some have more than they can possibly ever need and others struggle for daily bread.

Let us pray,

God, give us the grace to act with compassion for all who are struggling in this broken world. Amen