

# St. Mary's Sermon

**John 6:22-35**

New living translation

1/08/2021

What do you spend all your time and energy doing? The answer to that question is quite revealing as it shows what our true priorities really are.

For many people today their answer would be, along the lines of, pursuing happiness or enjoying the pleasures of this world. So, to fulfil this dream, they invest a lot of time and energy in their career, attempting to earn as much money as they possibly can so that they can buy all the latest gadgets, mobile phones, cars, or foreign holidays. These days, we even have robots that cut the grass for you. Come on, what's that all about? This materialistic dream is fuelled by the relentless advertising campaigns we are constantly bombarded with in the media.

The truth is, that none of these worldly things can ever truly satisfy us. I've said it before and I make no apology for saying it again, if this pandemic has shown us anything it is the utter futility of our materialistic lifestyle. If Jesus had been preaching the sermon on the mount today, he might well have said, *do not store up for yourself treasure on earth where thieves break in to steal it and a global pandemic can destroy it.*

Jesus had just miraculously fed the crowd until they had all had their fill and the disciples had picked up 12 baskets full of leftovers. But the very next day, the crowd go off in pursuit of Jesus because they are hungry again, no doubt hoping for another free meal.

Perhaps we should not be surprised by this, as food is essential to our very survival. According to a survey, compiled with the help of the Ministry of Agriculture and the British Nutrition Foundation, by the time we reach 70 the average person will have eaten three cows, seventeen pigs, twenty-five lambs, 420 chicken, four miles of sausages, 1190 portions of fish and chips, 3500 loaves of bread and 2240 bags of crisps. To wash this down we will have swallowed the equivalent of sixty baths full of milk and 93 thousand cups of tea, together with 910 gallons of beer, 25000 glasses of wine and 7280 measures of spirit!

Jesus clearly saw through the crowd's motive. He was aware that their reason for following him was entirely wrong and they had completely failed to understand the point of the miracle that they had been part of. They did not look beyond the purely superficial physical sign to comprehend its deeper spiritual meaning. Now I must admit that I had never understood the significance of this amazing and extravagant miracle before.

As I was preparing this talk it struck me that Jesus did not just provide them with a tiny snack to tide them over until they could get back home and have a proper meal. No Jesus sent them away fully satisfied. Not only that the disciples picked up twelve baskets full of leftovers. It was a clear sign of God's gracious and compassionate love and his extravagant provision for their physical needs. Jesus' intention in providing this amazing miracle was for the crowd to realise, to make the connection, that if this is how God provides for the physical needs of his people, how much more will he provide for their spiritual needs as well.

It is clear, that as good Jews, they were aware of the way that God had miraculously provided mana for their ancestors each day following their escape from Egypt as they wandered through the desert for forty years before they entered the promised land.

The feeding of the five thousand was intended to be a very clear sign that in Jesus God was doing a new thing, not just to provide for their physical needs but their deeper needs as well. Or, if you like, it could be considered as a new Exodus, a new type of Passover to provide spiritual food for his people.

Tom Wright sums it up very succinctly in his commentary on this passage when he wrote, what matters is not what Jesus can do for you; what matters is who Jesus is.

As Christians we can fall into the same sort of trap of adopting wrong motives. For example, when we pray, we can do so with entirely selfish ideals. We can become totally consumed by asking God to fulfil our physical needs, praying only for the miracle that we need, that we completely neglect to ask God to supply our spiritual needs.

Are you spiritually hungry? Are you searching for real meaning and purpose for your life? Perhaps you are looking for a change of direction as we emerge from this pandemic. Then I would encourage you to come to Jesus. Just as Jesus invited the people back then, he still invites us today to believe in him.

I know that it is not popular these days, in our multicultural society, to make claims like this, but I believe that true and lasting happiness can only be found through a relationship with God. All of us were created for that very purpose and as St Augustine put it many years ago, our hearts are restless until we find our rest in him.

A number of years ago now, the columnist Bernard Lewin, who to the best of my knowledge is not a Christian wrote, "countries like ours are full of people who have all the material comforts they desire, together with such none material blessings as a happy family and yet lead lives of quiet and at times noisy desperation, understanding nothing but the fact that there is a hole inside of them that however much food and drink they pour into it, however many motor cars and television sets they stuff it with, however many well balanced children and loyal friends they parade around the edges of it, it aches.

Having that relationship with Jesus enables us to have real life, life in all its fulness, life the way that God always intended it should be. God's extravagant provision for our spiritual needs should overflow with real joy, into the whole of our lives.

If you have never stopped to consider the claims that Jesus made perhaps now is the time for you to do so. Why not join the alpha course? It's a great course that has helped many thousands of people to consider the key questions of life and has resulted in many of them discovering Jesus and the way that he can change their life for the better. No one is excluded from God's generous love. God especially longs for those who have been broken by this world, those who have been rejected and the traumatised to experience his healing.

One other thing that struck me as quite strange in our reading this morning and that was that the crowd asked Jesus for another sign. Jesus had just given them one, feeding 5000 people from just five loaves and two fish. What more could they possibly want?

Tom. Wright suggests that they might have been looking for a sign with a more military implication, something like Jesus turning up in Jerusalem marching around the city and the walls crashing down, just like they had done when Joshua had marched around Jericho. But Jesus refused to give them one.

Human nature does not change. I've often heard it said if God will do this for me then I'll believe in him. Today we don't need another sign to prove that Jesus is God and all that he said about the kingdom of God is true. The only sign that we need is the resurrection, that is proof enough. Asking for a sign is just an excuse. What greater miracle could there be than someone being raised from the dead?