

I Gave My All

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church on July 25th, 2021 John 6:1-21 & Ephesians 3:1-14)

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I don't know how many there were, but it seemed like thousands were on their way out of town. I didn't know where they were going or why, but I packed some food (who knew how long I would be gone for) and headed out, following them all.

I should have told my folks where I was going, but they probably would have said no.

That Jesus fellow, he was trying to get away with his friends, this time up a mountain, looking for rest I guess. We'd been hearing about him, he'd done all these amazing signs – healing the sick, showing compassion, teaching them what the Scriptures meant, speaking about God in a new and different way. There was something a bit mischevious about him, he broke some of those long held rules, but always for a good reason, always putting people first and finding ways to include them.

My community were fairly religious and even though I was young I knew we were about to celebrate Passover, that time we remembered God leading our people out of slavery in Egypt.

Any way I joined the throng and found myself amongst the people. Jesus looked out at the crowds and instead of turning them away he worries about what they would eat. He seems to be having a long discussion with his friends – perhaps they were advising him to wrap it up and send the people on their way before it got late and dark. Turns out he was asking them where they could buy enough bread to feed the crowd. Anyone could tell it would cost a fortune, perhaps equal to a year's wages to feed that lot and then they'd only get a bit of a taste each – apparently that is just what one of his friends said. I was close enough to hear part of that conversation and I started to get the guilts, after all I had packed enough lunch to share with a few. So I tugged on the sleeves of one of his friends and showed him what I had, and offered it to them if they thought it would help.

To my amazement, he gratefully accepted my offering and gave it to Jesus. My hastily packed lunch, and he gave it to Jesus. Not sure what Jesus was going to do with it, wouldn't go far amongst the group. So I watched and waited to see what would happen next.

He, Jesus, did a number of very interesting things.

First, it was amazing that he cared enough about everyone's hunger – both physical and spiritual – to do something, something other than say get on your way. What compassion!

Next, he got everyone to sit down, all five thousand plus of them. If he was going to feed them he was really honouring them, treating them like guests. In our culture only honoured guests sat down to eat, the servants had to stand and eat as they had to be on the ready to serve their hosts in an instant.

Then he took one of my little loaves of bread, little rolls really, and broke it and gave thanks to God for it. This was becoming quite a ritual.

Next, it was given out, shared amongst the great crowd, amazingly everyone had as much as they wanted. This reminded me of the story of our ancestors in the wilderness,

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they complained and complained about not having enough food and even suggested life might have been better in slavery back in Egypt. Then they received a gift from God – quails to eat and manna from heaven each morning – only enough to meet your needs, not enough to store up. It was much the same here, only not as much complaining, seems like Jesus understood the needs of people.

Once everyone was fed, there were leftovers. What abundance came from my five loaves and a couple of fish.

This all was amazing and in a sense beyond explanation. The crowd had followed Jesus because of the signs he had been doing and it was as though they had just been part of a very significant sign, but it took them a while to process it all. It took a while for many of them to be able to say that he really was a prophet. I guess such an admission would throw their understandings of faith and of God into turmoil. Who was this man? Might he be the one for whom they hoped, for whom they waited, for whom they prayed?

Eventually, later in the evening, Jesus and his friends were able to get away from the crowd. His friends got into a boat but Jesus stayed behind – but that's a story for another day.

I found my way home and after trying to explain to the family where I had been all day, and, why I had taken so much food out of the pantry with me, and returned with none, I went and tried to sleep.

I couldn't sleep – I just kept going over it all in my mind. Who was this man? What was it all about? What did it mean for me and my life?

I heard that Jesus would describe himself as the bread of life – he certainly was that day. Not only did he feed the people physically but he fed their souls by his action, by showing compassion, by responding to needs before we even knew what they were and by teaching about God in a new way.

Many decades later, a man called Paul, would talk about how we had access to God through this man Jesus who they later called the Christ.

I learnt a lot that day.

- That God can do amazing things even with the little we have, if only we have the courage to offer it
- That God's love is expressed in sharing, that generosity is important
- That no matter how little, young, inexperienced or insignificant we might think we are, we can make a difference, we can change the world in some small way
- That Jesus feeds us in many ways – healing, teaching, showing compassion and actually sharing bread
- That when God in Jesus provides there is always enough, more than enough, there is abundance
- That compassion rules

I can only hope that in the centuries that follow the world might learn these lessons. That the people of the world might learn to share what they have so that all might have abundance, I pray that will be the case. Amen.