

"When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food." Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." "We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered. "Bring them here to me," he said. And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. 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 the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children." (Matthew 14:13-21)

"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare." (Isaiah 55:1-3)

On Thursday night I went to listen to Rev Tim Costello (the head of World Vision Australia) and Jim Wallis who was speaking on the topic "Reviving faith and politics". For some Christians faith has nothing to do with politics, it is a private matter between you and God. Others go to the opposite extreme and turn the Gospel of God's free forgiveness and salvation through Jesus Christ into a social and political program with almost no need for personal faith.

Wallis said our faith needs to be both – both personal and public. On the one hand it needs to be about you and God. Jesus and everything he has done for you on the cross and everything he says to you in his word needs to grab you and affect you personally as if you were the only one it was speaking to. But your faith also needs to be public, it needs to be about other people, community, church community and world community. Your faith in Jesus brings you into a movement, the kingdom of God, which flavours and changes people for good. It's not just about your inner world but your outer world and it's not just about your outer world but your inner world.

The disciples of Jesus had their personal time with Jesus but they were also challenged to think beyond themselves. In today's Gospel we find them and Jesus alone together for some spiritual refreshment as they were grieving the death of John the Baptist. They had Jesus to themselves. Suddenly they were confronted by a large crowd of sick and hungry people. Jesus healed the sick but when the disciples saw how hungry they all were they turned to him and said:

"Send the crowds away", "they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food" they advise Jesus. "Faith doesn't have anything to do with hungry people Lord! It's about spiritual things!" But Jesus turns to them and says "You give them something to eat". "With what?" they wonder. "We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish".

His disciples tried to give the hungry crowds back to Jesus. But Jesus gave them back to them and said "You give them something to eat". He gives the hungry crowds to us today and says the same thing. They are our responsibility too. We can't just tell them to take care of themselves, to buy what they don't have and can't afford. And we can't just fob them off to God in prayer either.

"You give them something to eat". Jesus' words echo down to us today.

Wallis told the story of how Bono, the lead singer of U2 was in Ethiopia and a father came forward out of the crowd and placed his son in Bono's arms. He thought it must be for a photo, but when he tried to give the boy back the father said "no, you take him, back to Ireland. If he stays here he will die." That was a turning point of faith and life for the singer. Faith suddenly got personal and public.

God puts the 30,000 children who die every day around the world from hunger or preventable disease in our hands and says **“You give them something to eat”**. “With what?” we ask with the disciples. We are finding it harder to make ends meet too. The needs of the crowds are so great, all the starving people, and we are trying to feed ourselves and our own children. Lord didn't you see the queue at the Caltex on Brighton Rd this week trying to get their hands on petrol for \$1.40 a litre? Didn't you see the picture in the paper of the lady at the checkout having to put things back because the NAB didn't credit her pay on time? Lord haven't you heard that we are having to cut out our daily cappuccinos too? Haven't you seen the interest rates on our mortgages? Lord it's all too hard. You do something, but don't look at us.”

And Jesus says to us what he said to his disciples “Give me what you can”. Whatever you have to share bring it to me. And he promises to bless it and use it to fill stomachs and flavour the world for him.

The disciples needed to learn that faith was both private and it was public. It was about them and Jesus but it was also about them and all the hungry people out there. But they also needed to learn not to be overwhelmed, but to trust what they had to Jesus, the Jesus who could bless and multiply what they offered him in faith. Sometimes we are so overwhelmed by the needs of the world we do nothing. And sometimes we are so overwhelmed by our own needs that we do nothing. Jesus asks us to see the hungry crowds of people in the world with his eyes of compassion and to give him what we can, whether that's money, time or energy and he invites us to dare to believe he will take what we give him and make it go further than we ever imagined in some way just like he multiplied the loaves and fishes in front of the disciples that day when 5,000 men and their families were fed.

And this miracle story today reminds us that we have far more than bread for the belly to offer the world. You see there is a hunger crisis out there that is not always visible and is often not faced up to. A hunger crisis the government can't respond to but the church can and only the church. There is a hunger in the hearts and souls of people whose homes and lives are full. There is an emptiness that all the money and all the food in the world can't fill. Only God can. And Jesus came to bring that soul food and soul drink to the world. He came to fill what can't be filled without God in your life. He came to fill you with love and forgiveness and hope and life, eternal life. He came to sustain you for not only this life but forever. In the Old Testament reading today God said:

“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.”

On Friday it was so cold I had a cup of soup for lunch and a bout 8 slices of white bread. That's the trouble with white fluffy bread, you can eat 8 slices and still be hungry! We often try to fill our lives up on white bread, on fluff, on what won't ever satisfy the soul, your deep inner being and life. If I ate one piece of my wife's favourite bread it would last all afternoon. Thick black German bread. You have a bread available to you that is free and filling for your soul. A bread of substance that fills and sustains and carries you through the day and through life. You know and enjoy Jesus who called himself the “bread of life.” You have his words and you have his meal available to you. It's a bread that keeps you alive and motivates you to feed the bodies and souls of others with both physical and spiritual bread. It's personal and it's public. It's a bread that fills you personally and a bread that energizes and empowers you to live for God in the world.

“You give them something to eat” - Jesus said to the disciples as they stared into the faces of all those hungry people. **“You give them something to eat”** - Jesus also says to us. Give them of what I have first given you. Give them of your food for the body and give them of your food for the body and soul. Give them daily bread and give them bread of life. Give them the bread they need as the disciples did - through me, with thanks, and in faith.

Now I can hear Jesus calling us to God's table for the bread of life that sustains our bodies and souls to life eternal. He gives us something to eat – so that we might want to give them something to eat too, something for the body and for the soul.