

BCUC Service July 28, 2024

PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD: Can your trust stand the test?

The story of the feeding of the 5,000. It is probably well known to us all. It would have been well known in the first and second centuries as each of the writers of the gospels included it in their gospel. But I raise the question is it as relevant today as it was in the first and second centuries when it was first heard? Can we hear messages for us today at BCUC in the 21st Century? Let's have a look.

Each of the gospel writers takes a slightly different approach to the story. John, who has a habit of editorialising, or giving us explanations for things, suggests that Jesus was **testing** the disciples. What was he testing? Perhaps to help answer this question we need to think like the disciples. I am going to ask you to use your imagination and try and experience the event as one of the disciples. What is the test? Will you pass it?

THE STORY

Imagine, it was getting late on a warm day, and you have been walking around with Jesus all day as he healed many people. Crowds were following you. You watched Jesus heal, you may have talked to some of the crowd and perhaps even had to do some crowd control. You are now feeling weary and hungry. Jesus is looking exhausted. You go with Jesus up a mountain to try and get some rest and some "me" time. But that is not to be. The crowd starts to follow. What should you do? You look at Jesus.

Jesus, knowing the crowd would be hungry, tired though he be, looks at them with **compassion**. They needed feeding. How do you feed so many? He threw the problem to **Philip** to solve. "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat". Simple enough question, but they were up a mountain, there would be no MacDonalds, supermarkets, a corner store or even a market stall handy. Philip lived in the area, and he was the most likely of the disciples to know if there were any food sources available. No doubt you were waiting for Philip to provide an answer. Were there food sources handy? Philip looked at the size of the crowd and doing a quick calculation answered that two hundred denarii, about 6/12 wages, would not buy enough food for each of them to get even a little. It was a huge crowd. Even if there were food available, food, in such quantities, costs money. As disciples you were not rich and certainly would not have that amount of money.

Andrew, on the other hand sought a more practical answer. He mingled among the crowd looking for food and found one small boy whose mum must have had foresight and packed him a lunch - 5 small barley loaves and 2 small fishes. Now these barley loaves, being the staple diet of the poor, were quite small. The 2 fishes were about the size of sardines. Andrew asked the obvious question- how far would this go among so large a crowd.?

So, Jesus had thrown the problem to you the disciples. Philip and Andrew saw the situation as impossible. To feed the crowd would require a lot of money that they didn't have. All they had were a boy's offerings, extremely meagre - hardly enough for a growing boy, let alone a crowd.

What would you have been thinking at this time? Would you have a solution? Would you agree with both Philip and Andrew? Would you too see only an insurmountable problem? Was there an alternative?

You looked towards Jesus. Obviously, Jesus does not agree with you. Jesus looks at the loaves and fishes. He then **takes charge**. He gets the huge crowd – 5000 men and no doubt thousands of women and children as well to be seated on the grass. (If you are having trouble imagining this crowd, it would probably almost fill our Mars Stadium here – its capacity is 11,000.) It was an enormous crowd.

Jesus then **takes the loaves**, and, as he would normally do with such food, **gives thanks, and breaks** the loaves apart and distributes the pieces to the crowd. He did the same with the fish. You watch in amazement. As you watch, suddenly, the food was being passed and everyone was eating. When they had had enough there was still food left over.

Jesus then ordered you to **collect the leftovers** so that nothing was wasted. As a Jewish person, you carried with you a basket in which you stored your possessions as you travelled- a bit like we would use a backpack. Thus, there were twelve baskets available, and you each filled yours with leftovers.

OK. You were there. What did you see? Might I suggest -

1. **You saw how a tired Jesus have compassion for the crowd and act on this compassion.**
2. **You saw that your own resources were insufficient.**
3. **You saw that in handing over meagre resources to Jesus, they were used in ways you never imagined.**
4. **You saw scanty resources, not only meeting the need of others but doing so abundantly.**

You may well be asking yourself, what happened? Did Jesus perform a physical miracle and change the bread and fish? You couldn't see. Or was it another type of miracle, what we might call an **ethical** miracle where Jesus changed hearts instead of bread? John explains that it was close to the Jewish Passover feast, therefore there would be many pilgrims in the crowd. These pilgrims were on a journey to Jerusalem and would be likely to be carrying some food for their journey. Thus, when Jesus passed around the broken loaves and fishes, they could produce their own food and share it. Hence the miracle was that those with, shared with those without. Either way it was a miracle.

John claims this is a test of the disciples. What was being tested? Jesus asked, "where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" as though it were an easy proposition. As a disciple on the day, you could not solve the problem Jesus gave you. Your own resources were too small, the crowd was too large.

THE TEST

So, what was being tested? Let me suggest, simply it was your TRUST. Trust at three levels- trust in yourselves, trust in Jesus and trust in others.

1. Trust in yourselves

You had to trust yourselves.: -

- a) to overcome weariness, feel compassion for those in need, and act on that compassion?
- b) to seriously look at your own resources, count the cost of any action and trust it would be sufficient?

2. Trust in Jesus.

The small boy in offering his meagre resources, put his trust in Jesus. Could something be done with them? I feel sure he did not for one moment think that his offering would feed the vast crowd., but he gave them to Jesus in trust that something would happen. Did you ask yourself how your trust compared with that of the little boy? Could you have handed over whatever meagre resources you had to Jesus in complete trust? Could you trust Jesus with your all?

3. Trust in other people

Did you trust the people gathered that day to respond to the needs around them by sharing their resources? Did you expect that such sharing would not only feed the crowd, but do it abundantly? Did you witness the change of heart?

So, Jesus was testing the trust of his disciples, so that a seemingly impossible task was possible when the disciples had trust in themselves, trust in Jesus and trust in others.

RELEVANCE OF THE STORY

But we need to ask ourselves is this story relevant to us today here at Ballarat Central? Do we face a seemingly impossible situation? Well, we do. How long can we survive as a congregation into the future? How would trust help us meet our challenges?

Trust in Ourselves

Let's have a look at trust in ourselves. Here at BCUC, we have the challenge of a building needing repairs and ongoing maintenance, as well as our strong commitments to ministry and mission. At times these needs may seem overwhelming. Do we still have the **compassion and energy** to fulfil the requirements of mission and ministry AND the maintenance of our building? Our compassion may seem strong, but do we sometimes become weary in well doing.? How strong is our trust in ourselves that we do have the energy to act decisively on our compassion? Is tiredness an excuse for insufficient trust?

What of our **resources**? Perhaps like Philip we want to weigh the cost. There is no doubt that meeting the needs of those in our city and in our congregation costs money. We know we have limited resources and face the question of how long these will last . But is money the whole answer? Are there other resources available? What other resources can we find? Do we need to focus on our own talents and time? How resourceful can we be? Do we need

more trust in ourselves to use ALL that we have available, no matter how small it appears to us?

Trust in Jesus

Andrew, in finding a small boy willing to share the meagre resources, took inventory and raised the question of their adequacy. In contrast what trust the little boy had. He handed over all his food without hesitation. Do we need to go out in trust to find more resources, and trust that even sparse resources can be turned into not only sufficient to meet need, but do it abundantly? Imagine if we had the trust of the little boy that our meagre resources at BCUC could be found to be not only adequate, but abundant if only we handed them over in trust. Perhaps all of us are this little boy.

Trust in others

We are not in this alone. We are each an integral, but essential part not only of a congregation, but part of the Ballarat community, part of a wider church. Are we prepared to put our trust in other people? Do others have resources that we do not have? Perhaps like the crowd on that day, their resources may have remained hidden until they saw it was safe to share them and in sharing them, all would receive enough. Perhaps we too need to change their hearts. Use our imagination to think how we might approach those who have resources to encourage them to share them?

Conclusion

So what can we conclude? Is this story still relevant? Yes, in my opinion, this story is just as relevant in 2024 at BCUC as it was so long ago in a mountain in Bethsaida. There are needs to be met, they seem overwhelming. Have we enough trust in ourselves, in our compassion to act even if we are weary? Are we willing to dig deep into our own talents and time as well as our resources and hand them over in complete trust for the future of our congregation? And can we trust ourselves to seek out others with different resources from ourselves and encourage them to share in our future. Same challenges -a seemingly impossible situation, but same trust required -trust in ourselves, trust in Jesus and trust in others.

Can your trust stand the test?