

End the Week with CME - July 10, 2009

10th Jul 2009

Welcome to End the Week with CME! This weekly email is sent automatically to Clergy and Readers in the diocese (if you don't want to receive it, please send an email to CovEW-unsubscribe@lists.covlec.org) but anyone is welcome to subscribe to the list, and we are especially keen to pass it on to any interested lay people, especially those who may have responsibility for preaching. To subscribe they simply need to email CovEW-subscribe@lists.covlec.org.

This is the last 'End the Week' for the time being. I hope you enjoy the Summer and have time to rest and relax. We hope to be back on September 11th.

CME Events Coming Up

September 22, 2009 - Spanish Mystics

A Spirituality Reflection Day with Ruth Tuschling, Tuesday 22 September at Offa House, 10am-3pm with an abbreviated repeat from 7.30-9.30pm. Cost: £30 (including lunch) for the daytime course, £12.50 (including coffee and cakes) for the evening. Grants of half the cost are available for clergy and Readers. Book through cme@covcofe.org.

September 23, 2009 - Models of Parochial Ministry

A Study Day hosted by the Rugby Team Ministry and facilitated by Dr Helen Cameron (The Oxford Centre for Ecclesiology and Practical Theology). Wednesday 23 September, 10am - 4pm at St George's Church, St John's Avenue, Rugby.

The aims of the day are:

- To hear the experiences of others involved in the creative re-shaping of parochial ministry.
- To engage with an external theological reflector and with guests who are also interested in the alternatives to lumping more and more parishes together in the search for viability.
- To disseminate the developments more widely.

We want to hear the experiences of parishes who are remodelling the shape of their ministry, to take better account of the gifts of the laity and the opportunities for mission that are provided by developing that ministry.

We also want to hear the ways in which stipendiary clergy input has been used to support this development.

This is for you if you are:

- Being creative about the shape of parochial ministry, now and in the future.
- A decision-maker at diocesan level, somebody who can bring about change.

The cost for the day is £30 (including lunch). Grants for half the cost are available for clergy and Readers.

For further information, contact Revd Mark Beach (Team Rector of Rugby) at rector@rugbyteam.org.uk or on 01788 565609. And to book a place, please contact Sarah Palmer (Coventry CME) at cme@covcofe.org or on 02476 521316.

For details of all the events coming up, which have been advertised in recent editions of End the Week, please go to <http://www.coventry.anglican.org/ministry/learning/trainingstudy/>

Notes on the Gospel Readings for Sundays 19 & 26 July and 2, 9, 16 & 23 August (Trinity 6 - 11) Mark 6.30-34, 53-end; John 6.1-21, 24-35, 41-51, 51-58, 56-69

The Feeding of the Five Thousand

'Jesus feeds five thousand' shrieks the headline, "He cut the bread very thin" claim sceptics' says the sub-head. "This has to go down as one of the greatest catering-based miracles," said an expert. "There were even twelve basketfuls of left-overs." The quotes are not from the Galilee Gazette but Nick Page's The Tabloid Bible (HarperCollins 1998), which entertainingly retells bible stories in the style of The Sun.

Certainly the status of this event as 'one of the greatest catering-based miracles' seems to be confirmed by the way it dominates the gospel readings for the summer. Six weeks are devoted to the miracle and the subsequent discourse in John's gospel. In this 'End the Week' reflection I shall take a slightly different approach to the usual one, offering a comment on the event as a whole rather than focussing on each passage. The effect of the lectionary is to divert from the run of Mark's gospel to an intensive examination of how John interprets the feeding, before we rejoin the flow of Mark again at the end of August.

The feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle story to be told in all four gospels, so in that sense the lectionary compilers are clearly on to something in the emphasis they give to this episode. It must have made a big impact in the earliest circles around Jesus.

Rather oddly, however, it's been cut out of the reading for Trinity 6 (July 19) to leave a (to my mind) rather

forlorn passage which sets the context of the miracle but just leaves a couple of Mark's summary statements about Jesus: he looked at the crowd with compassion, for they were 'like sheep without a shepherd' (Mark 6.34); he healed the sick (Mark 6.56). Compassion for others is, by contrast, not a major feature of John's telling of this story or any others. Not that he sees Jesus as lacking in compassion, simply that for John the life of Jesus is always told with reference to the unfolding of a higher plan: in his telling of the story Jesus' eyes are effectively always looking up to heaven rather than out at the crowds.

Nevertheless, Mark's summary statements do provide a clear context for the feeding of the five thousand and make it into something like an illustration of Jesus' compassionate nature. In John's gospel it becomes far more than this, and Jesus unpacks the meaning to demonstrate that he doesn't just provide bread, he is the bread of life himself (John 6.35).

Why was this miracle apparently such a non-negotiable part of the story of Jesus that all four gospels repeat it? It can be hard for us to grasp the significance of bread when we so rarely, if ever, feel real hunger. In other parts of the world this story may have a deeper resonance (I remember a girl I met in Uganda who said that her family could only afford rice two or three times a week – for her this story would have an immediate impact). The idea that Jesus invites the poor to share food with him – and that there is so much that there's a lot left over is very obvious good news if you have a constantly empty belly. The idea of a messianic banquet, where God will feed his people in the age to come, is a compelling dream to share (see Isaiah 25.6-9; 65.13-14).

Dominic Crossan asks 'What does messianic banquet mean for us, not as messianic but as banquet? If you surveyed North American images of heaven, how many would emphasize food and drink – enough and more than enough of it – as a primary metaphor? If I think about a meal, I do not think, Good, there will be enough for me to eat. If I think about a banquet, I do not think, Good, there will be more than enough for me to eat' (The Birth of Christianity T.&T.Clark, 1998, p.421). But for those who literally may not know where their next meal is coming from these are precisely the thoughts that come to mind. And the radical practice of the early church was to gather around a meal to which all, rich and poor, were welcome to share in the same food (see 1 Cor. 11.18-34). This was a practical acting-out of the banquet to come, a sign of the presence of the kingdom of God.

At another level bread was what a good ruler provided for his subjects. There is an implied criticism of Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee, and others who held political power, in the description of the crowd being 'like sheep without a shepherd' (Mark 6.34). The shepherd was an old image for the rulers of Israel, and the implied identification here of Jesus as the shepherd echoes the great prophecy of Ezekiel 34, where God himself says he will come to be the shepherd of the people. This is much lower-key than the grander claims which Jesus makes in John's gospel, but it contains the same idea. Also in view is the feeding of the people with manna in the wilderness (Exodus 16): again Jesus the provider stands in the place of God.

Good rulers provided bread (emperors famously kept the Roman crowds happy with 'bread and circuses'). So it's perhaps not surprising that the crowds use this miracle as a cue to make Jesus king (John 6.15). But he rejects the possibility, and the miracle of the walking on water underlines that Jesus is much more than an earthly king (John 6.19-20; see Mark 6.48-51 – it's worth noting that John and Mark both record Jesus saying 'I am', ego eimi, usually translated 'It is I').

In other words the feeding of the five thousand is a miracle that reveals a great deal about Jesus' identity- the central issue of Mark's gospel. The Lectionary's summer diversion into John helps to fill out the picture of who

Jesus is, before we rejoin Mark's story in chapter 7 at the end of August.

And Finally...

One day a man went to an auction. While there, he bid for an exotic parrot. He really wanted this bird, so he got caught up in the bidding. He kept on bidding, higher and higher and higher. Finally, after he bid far more than he intended, he won the bid - the fine bird was finally his!

As he was paying for the parrot, he said to the Auctioneer, "I hope this parrot can talk. I would hate to have paid this much for it, only to find out that he can't talk!" "Don't worry", said the Auctioneer, "He can talk. Who do you think kept bidding against you?"

And...

A dishwasher stopped working. The family left the key to the door under the mat with a note: 'Please leave the bill and we'll post a cheque. Don't worry about the Rottweiler. He won't bother you. But, whatever you do, do not under any circumstances talk to the parrot!'

When the repairman arrived the next day, he discovered the biggest and meanest looking Rottweiler he had ever seen. But the dog just lay there on the carpet, watching the repairman go about his business. However, the whole time he was there, the parrot drove him mad with his incessant squawking and talking. Finally the repairman couldn't contain himself any longer and yelled: "Shut up, you stupid bird!" To which the parrot replied: "Get him, Brutus!

That's all, folks!

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