

Biblical Resource - Matthew 14 : 13 - 22

In the gospels we can read stories which give us examples of Jesus performing miracles and healing, but it is easy to feel that he had powers which we do not have and that to respond to the call to mission is somehow beyond us with our limited ability and expertise. In his commentary on Matthew's gospel Tom Wright offers a blueprint for mission as he reflects on the familiar feeding of the five thousand.

Read the passage and reflect on it:

- Does the outline reflect your own personal experience?
- What about the experience of embarking on a specific piece of mission in your church?
- What might you learn from Tom Wright's reflection which could inform the development of mission in your own context?

Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand (NIV)

¹³When 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. ¹⁴When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

¹⁵As 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."

¹⁶Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."

¹⁷"We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered.

¹⁸"Bring them here to me," he said. ¹⁹And 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. ²⁰They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. ²¹The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Tom Wright invites us to:

'Imagine yourself as one of the **disciples** - not a leader, just one of the Twelve, or perhaps one of their other friends or cousins, hanging around on the edge. You see how Jesus cares

for people, and you'd like to care for them too. So you think what might be best for them, and come to him with a suggestion. Wouldn't it be good to send them away now, so that they could go and buy food rather than all getting hungry here, miles away from anywhere?

Jesus is always delighted when people around him come up with ideas which show that they're thinking of the needs of others. But often what he has to do is to take those ideas and do something startling with them. If you really care for them, he says, why don't *you* give them something to eat? This is, perhaps, the typical note of vocation. Our small idea of how to care for people gets bounced back at us with what seems a huge and impossible proposal. You protest. I can't do it! I haven't got the time. I haven't got the energy. I haven't got the ability. All I have is ...

Ah, but that's the next step, and again typical of how God's calling works. By hanging around Jesus, you've had an idea. It wasn't quite in focus, but your main intention - in this case, that the people should be fed - is on target. Jesus proposes achieving that aim by a different means. You say it's impossible - *but you're prepared to give him the little you've got, if it'll be any good*. Of course it means you'll go hungry yourself... but by now you're in too deep to stop. Once the power of Jesus' compassion has begun to catch you up in its flow, you can't stop.

What precisely Jesus does with what we give him is so mysterious and powerful that it's hard to describe in words. Imagine yourself standing there, while Jesus, surrounded by thousands of people, takes this pitifully small amount of food, hardly enough for two people, let alone a crowd, and prays over it. He thanks God for it. He breaks it, and gives it to you and the others, and you give it to ... one person after another after another, without knowing what's happening or how.

Think through how it's happened. Being close to Jesus has turned into the thought of service; Jesus takes the thought, turns it inside out (making it more costly, of course), and gives it back to you as a challenge. In puzzled response to the challenge, you offer what you've got, knowing it's quite inadequate (but again costly); and the same thing happens. He takes it, blesses it, and breaks it (there's the cost, yet again), and gives it to you - and your job now is to give it to everybody else.

This is how it works whenever someone is close enough to Jesus to catch a glimpse of what

he's doing and how they could help. We blunder in with our ideas. We offer, uncomprehending, what little we have. Jesus takes ideas, loaves and fishes, money, a sense of humour, time, energy, talents, love, artistic gifts, skill with words, quickness of eye or fingers, whatever we have to offer. He holds them before his father with prayer and blessing. Then, breaking them so they are ready for use, he gives them back to us to give to those who need them.

And now they are both ours and not ours. They are both what we had in mind and not what we had in mind. Something greater and different, more powerful and mysterious, yet also our own. It is part of genuine Christian service, at whatever level, that we look on in amazement to see what God has done with the bits and pieces we dug out of our meagre resources to offer to him.'

Wright, T., 2014, *Matthew for Everyone – Part 1 Chapters 1 – 15*. SPCK