

“Surely this man must be the prophet who should come in to the world?”

5000 people is a large crowd and I don't suppose that most of those there were really aware of what was taking place. Yet word spread that something extraordinary was happening, and the response was: “Surely this must be the prophet who should come into the world?”

Startling revelations are nothing new, especially to those who read the tabloid press or the Sunday papers. It's what keeps the circulation up. Even the serious papers indulge our voyeuristic tendencies by devoting three or four pages of what they call 'in-depth analysis'.

The feeding of the 5000 was a startling event, which we call a miracle. John calls it a sign. It certainly is not an act of magic, nor was it simply an unusual occurrence. It was a sign which brought with it a revelation of who Jesus was. No wonder they wondered if Jesus was the promised prophet.

Of course we ask questions about this event. How did Jesus do it? We're not wrong to ask such a question since God gave us minds to reason and to question and not to use our God-given gifts is sinful. But we have to ask the right question. If we insist on asking questions of the 'How' variety we can so easily miss the point as so often with the revelations of God, and come up against a blank wall.

The questions we should be asking are why he did this, and what does it tell us both of Jesus and of God? I suspect that the 'why' was that this feeding was helping the disciples answer the question which must have been constantly on their minds: 'Just who is this man; is he the Messiah?' But it also tells us a great deal about the abundant generosity of God's grace.

The feeding of the 5000 tells us about the nature of revelation. Christianity, after all, is a revealed religion. It comes to us and is not a figment of our imagination, as so many like to believe today. The Bible is the story of God's revelation of himself through history, through the prophets and above all in the person of Jesus Christ, who is the fulfillment of all the promises made in the Old Testament and especially to King David.

Revelations often come to us when we're not expecting them, and may even be unwelcome. It may be a flash of inspiration; or the sudden dropping of the penny as ideas click into place and we see something more clearly and with fresh understanding. This inspiration isn't something to be analysed, but accepted. To get bothered about the 'how' of things is to miss the point.

In his book 'The Go-Between God', Bp John Taylor speaks of the work of the Holy Spirit bringing understanding, knowledge and insight to God's people. He tells of suddenly seeing the familiar in a new and intense way, so heightening our appreciation of it, making us aware of how we are part of something bigger. He tells of one day, travelling down a well known road and a tree he had passed many times and hardly noticed suddenly stood out as an object of supreme beauty.

This can also happen with relationships. I was in our classroom after school talking with a friend when the form master came in. I'd never felt anything much about him. He was efficient, fair but strict, but as a person was not much more than a cardboard cut-out. As we were talking he quite naturally joined in and I can remember that he suddenly became a real person, three dimensional, warm and caring, and my feeling of surprise.

As we try to live closer to God day by day, so I believe that we become more open to receive such insight, and become more aware of God's activity, more able to point others to that activity.

This thought is captured in today's Epistle, which is the end of the first half of the letter, before turning in chapter 4 to more detailed instructions for holy living. The words here are a prayer of praise to God, summarizing the first three chapters and looks forward to the second half. So the focus of the prayer shifts between the wider scope of God's love and the life of the believer within the bigger picture.

So God blesses us with his abundant generosity poured out on every family on earth. Then St Paul focuses down as he prays that the Ephesians may be strengthened by the Spirit as they work out their life of faith, rooted and grounded in Christ. They will then find that they can achieve far more than ever they imagined through his spirit at work within them.

So we return to God's abundant grace poured out as Jesus feeds the 5000. Jesus takes the meager gift of bread and fish, and uses them in a remarkable way, in spite of the doubts of the disciples. And so it is with so much that we offer to God – he uses what is the inadequate, often half-hearted gifts we bring and amazing things happen.

A Chinese boy living in Manila in the Philippines was saving to buy a bicycle, but when he'd save £3 he decided that he wanted to help the Chinese who were suffering terribly under the Japanese, and many were going hungry. So the boy went to the baker and bought up as much bread as he could and took it to the Chinese Relief Cttee. They were surprised and wondered what to do with the bread because they couldn't send it to China before it became stale. They didn't want to hurt the boy's feelings, so they called it "Patriotic Bread" and sold it to the Chinese living in Manila. It all sold, and the boy's £3 became £10.

They decided to repeat the offer, bought more bread with the £10, and sold that, making £300, which they sent to China in the boy's name. There happened to be an American who heard of this sale and when he returned to America he told his friends all about the boy. Henry Ford,

the motor manufacturer, heard and decided that as the boy hadn't got his bike he would donate one to him. So he sent \$20 and asked the Relief Cttee to buy a bike for the boy. The boy was delighted, but he still wanted to do something for the Chinese, so he hired out the bike at 10p an hour. The bicycle went on the support a Christian home for 15 orphan boys.