**10am Eucharist on Sunday 28 July 2024**

**2 Kings 4:42-44, John 6:1-21 and Eph 3:14-21 – Understanding and experiencing the fullness of God begins with a readiness to see and believe**

*By the power of the Holy Spirit may what I say and what we hear be to your glory*

Do you recall Malcolm Gladwell’s 2009 book *Outliers*? It was the book that brought to a wider audience the concept that practising a skill for 10,000 hours could make you an expert. It’s a concept that can be traced back to 1993, to an academic paper written by Anders Ericsson. Ericsson looked at the progress of a group of violin students and noted that it was the ones who’d each averaged at least 10,000 hours of practice who became the elite performers. It made Ericsson wonder if we were inclined to give too much prominence to the idea of innate talent. A gift – a quality - that some of us have, and some of us don’t.

I wonder whether you think of **faith** as something that you either have or you don’t?

And I wonder whether there’s a danger in that approach? That we might then miss the importance of ourselves maintaining an openness and a willingness to engage in developing faith?

Sometimes people ask: *why didn’t God make it easier for us to know him? Why does everything Jesus said and did have to be so cryptic?*

Now there are differing views as to why Jesus spoke in parables. Some think Jesus did it to accommodate his listeners’ lack of understanding, and others that it was something he did in order deliberately to obscure the plain meaning of his words.

But whatever we think about the parables, today’s gospel shows us Jesus deliberately taking every possible step to reveal himself as the Messiah. The Messiah who has come to keep the promises of Scripture.

Listen to it here: ***A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick.***

And did you notice how Jesus sets up what he is about to do with a discussion with the disciples about its impossibility? When Jesus asks Philip ***“where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?”*** [***Jesus] said this to test him, because [Jesus] himself knew what he was going to do”***. Philip perfectly encapsulates the impossibility of the task: ***“six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little”***.

And Andrew reinforces the point with ***“there is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?”***

Andrew’s question echoes the one posed in our first reading by the servant commanded by Elisha to give the people the twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain intended as an offering for Elisha alone. ***“How can I set this before a hundred people?”***

The very impossibility of the task is what makes it a sign that God is at work. And then Jesus doubles down on demonstrating that such impossibility by telling his disciples ***gather up the fragments left over”***, and ***“from the fragments of the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets”***.

So that there could be no doubt that 5,000 men really were fed with ***“as much as they wanted, [so that] they were satisfied***”***.***

John’s Gospel is written that those who, in the words of John’s prologue receive Christ, who believe in his name, and who become children of God, might recognise Christ as the one who makes known God the father.

John sets out to write about seven different signs by which Jesus could be recognised as the Messiah and the Son of God. Jesus turns water into wine; he heals the official’s son, the man under the porticoes by the pool, and the man born blind; he feeds 5000 men with 5 loaves and 2 fishes; he walks on the water; and he raises Lazarus from the dead.

And as John writes at the end of the gospel, these signs are written ***so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.***

**Understanding and experiencing the fullness of God begins with a readiness to see and believe**

And those signs are still there: as much and even more than they were there for Jesus’ contemporaries.

Because we don’t just have the Biblical record of the signs and wonders of Jesus and of the apostles. None of them more dramatic than the resurrection of Jesus, after being so visibly put to death on the cross.

We have the signs of the goodness of God in the testimony of generations of Christians’ testimony. Witnesses to hearts that have been healed, and lives transformed, through faith in Christ.

Such signs help us to make sense of that call; that gravitational pull towards God.

Sometimes the signs of the existence of God and of his desire to relate to us are scary. When the disciples saw Jesus ***“walking on the lake and coming near the boat, they were terrified … but he said to them “it is I; do not be afraid”***.

When it begins to dawn upon us that God might be using events in our lives and our response to them to speak to us and to engage with us, that can be daunting. Especially if, rather as Jesus began to come to the disciples after ***“the lake became rough because a strong wind was blowing”***, it is only when things are not going smoothly that we ask ourselves the questions that lead us to find God.

But once we do realise that this is God reaching out to us, then, rather as the disciples, when they knew that it was Jesus, ***“wanted to take him into the boat”***, so we need to have the confidence to take God into our lives.

We don’t have to understand everything about God before confessing that we believe in him.

After all, we are perfectly happy to accept, without even blinking, that we don’t understand everything about plenty of other matters.

Take the mobile phone. I doubt whether anybody could explain everything about what enables a mobile phone to function. It is not just the mechanics of microchips. It is the economic markets and political conditions that produce the various components. The satellite technology that enables, and the laws that constrain, the exchange of information. It is far too much for any single person to master. That doesn’t stop us engaging with our phones.

Surely, we can be as open-minded towards God? As willing to explore and to question? To enjoy what we experience and to engage with what challenges us?

If we open ourselves up to the meaning and significance of the signs of God in our lives, we can come to believe that ***Jesus is … the Son of God***, and that through believing we can have ***life in his name***.

And then follows that understanding and knowledge that Paul was praying for the church in Ephesus, leading to ***the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.***

Knowing Christ and being rooted and grounded in his love – loving him and being loved by him.

***By the power of the Spirit at work within us [and] able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine***

**Understanding and experiencing the fullness of God begins with a readiness to see and believe.**

Amen.