

Trinity 9, 2026

Sermon: "Hesed" (Isaiah 55:1-5; Matthew 14:13-21)

O Lord, take my lips and speak through them; take our minds and think through them; take our hearts and set them on fire with love for yourself. Amen.

Our two lectionary readings today are united by the striking theme of God's abundant provision. And despite all appearances, neither text is just about food. Rather, the two passages are concerned with spiritual hunger, that of human longing for life with God. And both passages proclaim that God alone can satisfy that hunger through his gracious initiative.

Isaiah was speaking to Israel in exile. Israel was a people who had lost everything they believed were signs of God's favour. They had lost their land, the temple, the monarchy, and security. They were displaced and disillusioned. And into that dire situation came this astonishing, generous invitation that begins with the words: "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters."

This surprising invitation overturns ordinary expectations. Those without money are invited to buy; those who cannot pay are welcomed to feast. Wine and milk are symbols of celebration, abundance, and nourishment, and they are offered freely.

The paradox is deliberate. The language of buying and paying is emptied of commercial meaning because God's gifts cannot be purchased. Covenant life is always grounded in grace before it is grounded in obedience. Israel's restoration was not achieved through political power or economic recovery, but because God remained faithful to the covenant he made with David.

Through his prophet, God reminded the people of his "everlasting covenant" and his "steadfast, sure love for David." We've heard a number of times during past years the Hebrew word *hesed* which means "steadfast love" and in Scripture, *hesed* is used to describe God's faithful covenant love that endures despite human failure. The restoration of Israel rested not on Israel's faithfulness but on God's.

Isaiah therefore asked a question which echoes through every generation: "Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy?" It's not just a criticism of poor economic choices. It's an invitation to examine misplaced worship.

Throughout Scripture, idolatry is repeatedly described as investing ourselves in things that cannot give life. We pour our energy into achievements, possessions, reputation, comfort, or power, expecting them to satisfy the deepest longings of our hearts. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with them, but they are finite goods. They do not lead to ultimate hope.

God's answer is not condemnation but invitation as he says, "Listen carefully to me... incline your ear... come to me... hear, that your soul may live." Spiritual life does not begin not with human effort but with hearing God's word. And this prepares us beautifully for the gospel passage.

In the verses immediately preceding today's reading, Matthew tells us that Jesus withdrew after hearing of the execution of his cousin, John the Baptist. The shadow of the cross had begun to fall across his ministry. Understandably Jesus needed solitude, perhaps for prayer and mourning. Yet the crowds followed him into what Matthew calls "a deserted place."

For the gospel writers, the physical context, or the physical setting matters. Matthew intentionally evokes Israel's experience in the wilderness after the Exodus. In the wilderness Israel depended entirely upon God's provision of manna. Now the crowds gather in another wilderness, where once again God's people have nothing with which to feed themselves.

The disciples understand the problem correctly but draw the wrong conclusion. Their unhelpful comment: "This is a deserted place... send the crowds away." Their solution is entirely logical. The people must fend for themselves. But Jesus refuses, replying, "They need not go away."

Jesus' words deserve careful attention. Throughout Matthew's Gospel, Jesus embodies God's refusal to abandon his people. Where human calculation sees dismissal, divine compassion sees responsibility. Then comes the command from Jesus: "You give them something to eat." And the disciples immediately calculate scarcity. "We have only five loaves and two fish."

Notice that Matthew repeatedly emphasises limitation. Five loaves. Two fish. Five thousand men, besides women and children. Human arithmetic

makes the impossibility unmistakable. Jesus does not dispute the calculation, but he refuses to let scarcity define reality. Instead he says to the disciples, "Bring them here to me," referring to the five loaves and two fish.

This is the turning point of the narrative. The miracle does not begin when the bread multiplies. It begins when inadequate resources are entrusted to Christ. As I wrote these words, my thoughts veered towards the interregnum that will soon be upon us. May we entrust our limited human and financial resources at La Côte to Christ, as we continue to care for our church community until a new chaplain comes to join us. But back to the gospel passage.

Matthew then describes Jesus' actions with language that every early Christian reader would have recognised: "He took... blessed... broke... gave..." These four verbs reappear almost verbatim at the Last Supper.

Matthew intended for his original readers, and for us, to see more than a miracle of provision. The miracle meal of the feeding of the five thousand plus anticipates the Eucharistic feast. The one who fed Israel in the wilderness, who fed five thousand people in another wilderness, will ultimately feed the Church with his own life.

The miracle is remarkable, not simply because everyone received food, but because "all ate and were satisfied." Note that final important word. Isaiah had promised that those who came to God would "delight themselves in rich food." Matthew now shows that promise being fulfilled in Jesus.

The satisfaction is not merely physical. Matthew consistently presents Jesus as the fulfilment of Israel's Scriptures. The abundance of bread reveals the abundance of God's kingdom breaking into history through the Messiah.

Even the twelve baskets left over are almost certainly not accidental. Throughout Matthew, twelve evokes the twelve tribes of Israel. God's provision is sufficient for the whole covenant people. Nothing is lacking.

Seen together, Isaiah and Matthew proclaim a profound theological truth that God's kingdom operates according to grace rather than scarcity. Human economies always first ask logically, "What do we have?" God asks, "Will you trust me?" Human economies begin by counting resources. God's begins with promise. Sadly, human economies divide because there is never enough. God's kingdom overflows because its source is God himself.

This is why these texts remain so important for the Church, and why we read them regularly. Congregations often think like the disciples. We count attendance. We calculate budgets. We measure volunteers. We worry about shrinking resources and increasing demands. None of these concerns are imaginary. They are real.

The disciples' numbers were accurate. What was incomplete was their theology. They assumed that what they possessed determined what God could accomplish. Jesus teaches the opposite. Everything begins by placing what we have into his hands.

The Church has always possessed less than it thinks it needs and more than Christ requires. For the power resides not in the bread but in the one who blesses it.

Our readings direct our attention beyond every earthly meal. Isaiah's invitation to the feast without price, and Matthew's banquet in the wilderness, they both point toward the greatest banquet of God's kingdom.

Every celebration of Holy Communion reminds us that we come not because we have enough, but because Christ has enough. We may come hungry, or thirsty, or empty-handed.

Christ receives what we bring. He gives us what we cannot provide for ourselves, and sends us away satisfied. This is not because our hunger has earned his generosity, but because his generosity has overcome our hunger.

This is the good news proclaimed by both Isaiah the prophet and Matthew the evangelist. The God who invites the thirsty is the God who feeds the hungry. The God who made an everlasting covenant with David has fulfilled that covenant in David's greater Son.

And because Christ is present among his people, scarcity never has the final word. **Grace** does. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.