

**Trinity 6 Chester Cathedral**  
**Taken, blessed, broken, given**  
**Mt 14: 13-21**

‘Taking the five loaves and the two fish, Jesus looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.’

In a few moments Canon Humphries, as President today, will perform the same actions- he will take, bless, break and give out the bread. The feeding of the 5000 is at the heart of what we do each week when we celebrate Eucharist together. To many outside it is a strange and obscure ritual having no relevance to today’s world; at best a purely personal gathering of like-minded people indulging their private fantasies; at worst, filling us with damaging ideas which distort minds and cause division and mayhem. They may perhaps be forgiven for thinking like this. With all the crises we have been bombarded with in recent weeks we perhaps should think carefully about exactly why it is so important that we are here today and what difference being here ought to make.

The Russian theologian Nicholas Berdyaev says:  
‘There are two symbols, bread and money; and there are two mysteries, the Eucharistic mystery of bread and the Satanic mystery of money. We are faced with the great task: to overthrow the rule of money and to establish in its place the rule of bread.’

The rule of bread. What do we learn from what we do with bread this morning? The liturgy of the eucharist- the shape of our worship- is structured around the four-fold action- taking, blessing,

breaking and giving;- I want to examine those actions in the light of what Jesus did in today’s gospel.

First, taking. There isn’t enough food. The disciples don’t think they have enough- their resources aren’t sufficient- they push the problem away. Let the people go and sort it for themselves. Perfectly natural reaction, we may think. How can we feed – or care for, or subsidise, or protect- so many. Not our problem. Nothing we can do. Go away.

Jesus: ‘They don’t need to go away- you give them something.’  
Reluctant scrabbling from the disciples- well, we suppose we can rustle up five loaves and two fish but that isn’t going to be enough is it?

We are convicted- of poverty of imagination, poverty of expectation, poverty of trust in the living God. Convicted of smallness- of heart and mind. When will we learn to give to God our poverty and allow him to transform it- to take it and show us he can always do more than we can imagine possible. In God’s hands there is always more than enough- for everyone. When we come here to Eucharist we come empty, needing to be fed and we receive what God chooses in freedom and grace to give us.

Second, blessing. In the Eucharistic prayer the bread is blessed. The whole prayer is one of thanksgiving and praise, rooted in the Jewish tradition. We give thanks, for creation, for our life, our well-being, our redemption. In that giving of thanks the bread which is symbolically the body of Christ, is consecrated to be our spiritual food. So in that sense the rule of bread is about spiritual nurture.

We are more than just physical beings, concerned with bodily needs and survival. Spiritual nurture draws us into God's realm, where 'we are all one in Christ Jesus' (as we will acknowledge at the Peace in a few moments). As God chose and blessed Jesus we also are taken- chosen- and blessed- consecrated for God's service. The rule of bread.

Third, breaking. After the Lord's Prayer the President breaks the bread, as Jesus broke those loaves for all those people. We are reminded that Jesus' body was broken on the cross- that he willingly gave up his life for us. 'Broken bread and wine outpoured' as today's prayer expresses it. Jesus gave himself away for us, and is always and forever the wounded healer. He shows us the way- for we are all broken, in our own ways- in body, heart, mind, spirit - and our brokenness can be, under God's blessing, a source of healing and a path to new life. Jesus, we are told, had compassion when he saw the crowd, even though he is full of personal grief after he had heard of the beheading of his cousin, John the Baptist. Despite this, he yet has compassion. Brokenness and compassion strangely are linked. Compassion means literally 'suffering with'. But the Greek of the NT is much stronger- it is about a feeling in the gut. And the OT Hebrew word for compassion also means uterus, womb. The word is firmly rooted in bodiliness. We are broken open that we may feel sick to the stomach at the ills of the world – so that we cannot switch off, we have to take action.

Fourth, giving. The bread is shared among the people and there is more than enough. We come to the communion rail together- it is not about each of us individually- it is not 'my communion' but what we do together. We come to God together, we worship

together and our communion is with each other as well as with our Lord. We receive the Body of Christ- as we walk back down from the altar rail we carry Christ inside us- that we may become the Body, be the Body- together. Given away, for the sake of others. The rule of bread.

I have said nothing this morning about the rule of money- that other mystery which Berdyaev speaks of. It is all so painfully self-evident. Eye-watering, obscene amounts of money are paid out in bonuses, transfer fees, lottery wins. Meanwhile 500,000 children are starving and dying in Somalia and charities beg the public for the money needed. The rule of money is indeed satanic.

We come, Sunday by Sunday, in our poverty- recognising our brokenness, our hard-heartedness, our failures of imagination and compassion. We come – not to have a nice experience and feel good about ourselves, or to feel we have done our duty, or to be counted worthy. We come empty and hungry, in our lack, in order to be fed. If we receive the Body of Christ we are saying that we want to live as people chosen, blessed, broken and given – for others. We come to be built together into the Body of Christ- that we may think, feel and act as our Lord showed us.

It is about transformation, little by little, week by week, as we are shaped and strengthened for service in God's world; the world needs to see the fruits of what we do week by week – see Christ in us- if the faith we profess is not to be judged irrelevant.

I have a little card on my mantelpiece with the words 'You are to be taken, blessed, broken, distributed, that the work of the incarnation may go forward.'

Michael Maine, former Head of Religious Broadcasting and Dean of Westminster Abbey, who died in 2006, wrote this:

Jesus, taking the bread, giving thanks for it, breaking and sharing it, identifies it with his life, identifies it with the whole self-giving, dying-to-self pattern of it which is now to be our pattern too. Here is the body language of God come into our midst. It looks forward to the time when the kingdom heart will have triumphed and the 'eucharistic mystery of bread' becomes the norm in our scandalously unequal world, where a billion people struggle to live on \$1 a day. It is a political statement, deeply incarnational. It is the most earthy and materialistic of sacraments. And by moving forward and holding out our hands to receive the broken bread, having yet again received forgiveness for our failure to live lives reliant on God's grace, we are desiring, choosing, to be identified with the costly way of love. And that is being Church. And it's no easier when you're 80 than it was when you were 18.'

Jesus said 'There is no need to send them away- you give them something to eat.'

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