

Five Loaves, Two Fish, and a Foodbank



By **Revd Mark Ackford** on 30/07/2026



This week's gospel gives us a wonderful glimpse of the compassion of Jesus and a retelling of one of his greatest miracles.

Matthew's Gospel gives us a very human scene. Jesus has just heard that John the Baptist has been killed, and he withdraws by boat to a quiet place. There are moments when grief, tiredness, or shock make us want to step away. Jesus does not pretend to be untouched by sorrow. He looks for space.

But the crowds follow him. They walk round the lake and meet him there. If I'm honest, I can imagine feeling a bit irritated: "Can I not just have five minutes?" Yet Matthew says that when Jesus sees the crowd, he has compassion for them. Not annoyance. Compassion.

That is the first thing worth noticing. Jesus' compassion is not sentimental. It moves him towards people. He heals, stays, and gives himself, even while carrying grief of his own. That comforts us, because when we come to Jesus tired or needy, we do not find a closed door. It also challenges us: compassion has to become a way of living.

Then evening comes. The disciples see the problem: they are in a deserted place, it is getting late, and the crowd is hungry. Their solution is practical: send them away to buy food. But Jesus replies, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat."

I wonder how that landed. The disciples look at what they have: five loaves and two fish. Not nothing, but nowhere near enough. Their words are familiar: "We have nothing here but..." Nothing but limited time, small gifts, a few doubts. Nothing but five loaves and two fish.

Most of us know that feeling. We see needs bigger than our resources: loneliness, poverty, grief, anxiety, injustice, and the quiet struggles people carry. It is tempting to say, "Lord, send them somewhere else. Send them to someone better equipped."

But Jesus does not begin with what they lack. He asks for what they have. "Bring them here to me." He does not shame the disciples for having so little. He takes the loaves and fish, blesses them, breaks them, and gives them back to share.

And somehow, in his hands, the little becomes enough. More than enough. Everyone eats and is filled, and twelve baskets are left over. This is not just a miracle about food. It is a sign of God's kingdom, where compassion interrupts scarcity and no one is dismissed as a problem to be sent away.

There is a Eucharistic shape here too. Jesus takes, blesses, breaks, and gives. Those are the same actions we hear at the altar, when ordinary bread and wine are shared as the body and blood of Christ. At Holy Communion we come hungry, with empty hands, and Christ feeds us with himself.

And then Communion sends us back out: "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord." What happens at the table is not meant to stay at the table. We receive Christ's life so that we can become, in small and ordinary ways, Christ's hands for others.

Based at Holy Trinity Church is our Community Matters foodbank. It began when members of our church community noticed that families in our village were quietly struggling to make meals stretch. I was not here when it started, but I imagine it began in a small and unimpressive way: a few shelves, a handful of volunteers, tins and packets donated after the weekly shop. It looked like five loaves and two fish.

But someone sorted the food, someone welcomed visitors, someone carried boxes, and someone told a neighbour where help could be found. No one person solved hunger. But together, something holy happened: food was received, blessed by generosity, broken open in sharing, and given away.

That, for me, is what the Eucharist trains in us. Week by week, Christ teaches us not to clutch what we have in fear, but to offer it in trust. We are fed at the altar so that we can recognise hunger in the world and refuse to send people away.

Perhaps that is why this story is so practical. It does not ask us to wait until we feel abundant before we serve. It asks us to bring what we have to Jesus, receive his life at the table, and let him place our lives back into our hands for others.

So perhaps the question is not, “Do we have enough?” Perhaps the question is, “What are we willing to bring to Jesus?” Our time, compassion, homes, skills, prayers, awkward attempts at kindness, our five loaves and two fish.