****

**Sunday 2 August to Sunday 9 August**

****

Sunday 2 August 2020

# Hungry?

by Georgie Schuster

**‘They all ate and were satisfied’ (Matthew 14:20a).**

Read Matthew 14:13–21

If there were two words to describe the Bible accounts for this week, they would be ‘God’s provision’. You could also insert any number of adjectives in the middle: miraculous, faithful, to name a couple. There are also a few common elements in these accounts: a person or people; a need (hunger); and God.

This theme of God's provision is replayed time and again in the Bible, over the course of centuries. Today, as always, God's provision is offered to us, for our open hearts and hands to receive.

Let’s start with this story that we have probably heard many times before. The feeding of the 5000.

Perhaps it begins as just an ordinary day, but then word gets out that Jesus was around. People join the crowd and follow the teacher, Jesus: eagerly hanging on to his every word ... witnessing power and compassion mix together as people are healed ... soaking in the presence of someone out of the ordinary.

And then it gets late. Jesus' care and concern for those who had sought nourishment for their souls extends to their physical needs, too. One boy’s lunch is offered. Thousands are fed – with twelve baskets left over! (Do you ever wonder who benefited from those leftovers?)

God, who created us – body, mind and spirit – knows our need on every level, our hunger for food and for truth. Here we see our compassionate God, meeting those needs for all to see and to experience for themselves.

What morsel from this encounter with Jesus will sustain you today?

***Dear God, our Loving Creator, you know our every need. You know our hunger. Please feed us now. We give you thanks. In Jesus’ name, Amen.***

Monday 3 August 2020

# A daily thing

by Georgie Schuster

**It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat (Exodus 16:15).**

Read Exodus 16:2–4,9–15

Ahh, the good ol’ days … Many a tale has been shared about what they were like. Truth be told, sometimes invisible rose-coloured glasses are worn by the teller of the tale. The focus has softened, some elements are glossed over or even left out, and certain highlights are emphasised with gusto. It can leave some who were around in the ‘good ol’ days’ scratching their head as they compare their memories of the same event!

I think that might have been happening to the Israelites as they selectively looked back at their time in Egypt where they enjoyed ‘pots of meat and ate all the food they wanted’. Before we get too critical of their grumblings, let’s remember that they were reacting to a very basic need, wondering where their next meal was coming from. They had witnessed miracles where God had rescued and provided for them, but this was today, a new day. Wilderness in front and no food reserves to fall back on. (Look how many responded only recently when our food supplies only seemed to be threatened.) Learning to trust God is a daily thing. All you ever have is his hand to hold as you walk into the unknown.

We hold on tight to our memories of the past because they are familiar. We don’t have an established reference point for the remaining hours of today and tomorrow. Or do we?

God provided manna and quail for his people. Interestingly, the whole deal with the manna was that it was a daily thing. God's people were only to collect what was needed for the day. And God was there the next day with further provision. They were on the move, after all. The same God who provided for the Israelites is our provider today. His track record has proven reliable. His heart is compassionate and his hand is strong. Hold on to him today!

***Dear Father, Provider, you know what I am going through. Help me to trust in you. Thank you for looking after me. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.***

Tuesday 4 August 2020

# The next page

by Georgie Schuster

**May you be richly rewarded by the Lord … under whose wings you have come to take refuge (Ruth 2:12).**

Read Ruth 2:1–18

On paper it didn’t look good. Ruth was a woman, a widow and a foreigner. Known for her determination, love and loyalty, she had followed her mother-in-law back to Bethlehem and set out to work so they would have enough to eat, to survive. Can you imagine the movie? Her back story, tragedy, loss. Leaving everything she knew to dedicate herself to a woman herself marked by pain and suffering. The isolation. The unknown.

And then she found herself in a field belonging to Boaz ... and things turned around in ways that she could never have imagined.

When Ruth asks Boaz why she had found favour, he brings to her awareness that God is in the bigger picture. His words, ‘The God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge’ (Ruth 2:12b) acknowledge what was really happening. Whether she initially realised it or not, Ruth came to discover that God was indeed a strong refuge and faithful provider for Naomi and herself. Food, protection, hope and a future.

It doesn’t matter what our life looks like on paper, or even what chapter we think we are up to. God hasn’t changed. He is our refuge and provider, as much as he was for Ruth and Naomi. With this confidence, I wonder what the next page of your story might bring?

***Dear Heavenly Father, help us to continually look to you instead of our circumstances. Shelter us under your wings of protection. You are our strong refuge and provider. Thank you for your great love. We give you thanks and praise. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.***

Wednesday 5 August 2020

# When things look bleak

by Georgie Schuster

**Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you (1 Kings 19:7).**

Read 1 Kings 19:4–8

Have you ever been in a place of mind where things look bleak? When you feel that you are spent? Where it is all too much?

In today's reading, we meet Elijah in a very dark moment in his life.

In the chapter before this, he had been involved in a dramatic and persuasive demonstration of God’s power, as people were challenged to really think about God.  He then signalled the end of a long drought and, surging with strength from God, outran the king’s horses from Mt Carmel to Jezreel. Confident in God and his power, he would have been feeling pretty good, wouldn’t you say?

A few short verses later, we find him afraid and on the run himself. Full of despair, he pours his heart out to God, telling him he has had enough!

God responds with compassion and care as he assigns an angel to feed Elijah. Nourished and strengthened, Elijah was sustained for a further 40 days and nights. The angel came to Elijah twice and encouraged him to eat and drink. This indicates that God was fully aware of Elijah’s physical and mental state of being. He knew his frailty and limitations and made sure that Elijah received what was needed.

There are times when feelings get the better of us. Circumstances fluctuate. Even though we know in our head that God is fully capable of meeting our needs, we react faithlessly to what is happening. Our desire to be in control is challenged, but perhaps it is in these times the bigger picture comes into focus. God loves us and has a strong desire to live in constant relationship with us. Why not hand our emotions to the one who knows us most and loves us best, and rest in him? He can and will meet all our needs.

***Dear Heavenly Father, you know us more completely than we know ourselves. Help us to remember this and rest in your arms of love. You are our faithful provider. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.***

Thursday 6 August 2020

# Calling all caterers!

by Georgie Schuster

**They will eat and have some left over (2 Kings 4:43).**

Read 2 Kings 4:42–44

Calling all caterers! Your assignment is to feed 100 hungry men. You have 20 loaves of barley bread for the task. After doing the maths, is this going to work?

This was the situation Elisha and his servant found themselves in. I must admit, with a number of miracles of provision involving multiplication to choose from, this one was not on my ‘go-to’ list. But again, we see another example, from the Old Testament, of God’s abundant provision. I say abundant, because there were leftovers!

Here are the ingredients for this account:

* The gift of the barley loaves offered to God’s prophet, Elisha
* A worried servant, fussing that this was not going to be enough to feed the 100 men that Elisha had told him to share it with
* A confident Elisha – confident in God’s ability to provide in any situation
* 100 men.

Method:

* God’s word for the circumstance: ‘They will eat and have some left over’ (verse 43).

The result:

* Full bellies and leftovers (and hopefully a greater awareness of God’s kindness, care and provision for all who were fed).

Time and again, God shows his willingness to be involved in our lives. He addresses our physical needs as well as the needs of our soul and spirit. Looking at challenges from his perspective can be a game-changer. The Bible is full of accounts that shed light on who God is and his great love and care for us. I wonder how this might influence your day, today.

***Dear Heavenly Father, we are grateful for all the ways you look after us. Help us to recognise your heart and hand in today’s activities. Please accept our gratitude! In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.***

Friday 7 August 2020

# Our deepest hunger

by Georgie Schuster

**I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never be hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty (John 6:35).**

Read John 6:25–35

All week we have been hearing about God’s ability to provide food for our physical bodies, in miraculous ways. But today we come to something deeper.

Bread would have still been fresh in people’s memories. Many would have been part of the large crowd who joined in the feeding of the 5000 as written earlier in the chapter, or if not, they would have heard about it! Jesus, acutely aware of this, needed people to change their focus to eternal matters.

He reveals himself as the bread of life – the source of nourishment that does not spoil or run out.

The people who first heard these words, and the words that followed, grappled with them. They struggled with who they knew Jesus to be (the son of Mary and Joseph) and now he was telling them that he came down from heaven and was/is the bread of life? We, however, have the benefit of hindsight: the Last Supper, Jesus’ death and resurrection, our celebration of holy communion.

We often think that we know what will satisfy us. In our quest to find peace and fulfilment on our own terms we often chase after and consume things that end up leaving us empty and wanting.

The depth of God’s love and commitment to us, however, is unfathomable. There is only one who can truly satisfy our deepest hunger. Father God provided what was needed. He sent Jesus, the bread of life. The offer is made for us to take and eat. What does that mean for you today?

***Dear Heavenly Father, for the gift of your Son Jesus, the bread of life, we give you our thanks. Our deepest hunger is fulfilled. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.***

Saturday 8 August 2020

# Love, peace and provision

by Georgie Schuster

**Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other (Psalm 85:10).**

Read Psalm 85:8–13

Do you ever find yourself caught up in something so absolutely beautiful that your body responds? You are aware that you are witnessing or being part of something deeper that makes you take notice. What is it like? A tear to your eye. Goosebumps. A held breath. What evoked this response? An exquisite piece of music. A sublime morsel of food. Words that speak deep into your soul.

The words in today’s reading from Psalm 85 have a poetic beauty about them. I would have loved to have heard them sung all those years ago. While they were first heard by God’s covenant people, they have been passed on to us today. What image comes to mind when you hear verse 10? – 'Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other'. A description of our loving God? What about the cross?

It can have a powerful and lasting impact when we reflect on God’s heart of love for his people, his faithfulness, care and willingness to provide for all our needs, and allow it to sink deep into our hearts and minds. It can displace the fear and anxiety that try to steal our peace. Age-old worries of having enough to survive, like food and shelter, can scream at us. They demand our attention. But as we have heard throughout this week, God supplies all our needs.

I encourage you to replace fear and anxiety with all that God has for you. Remember who you are, his precious child. Allow his love, peace and provision to fill your heart and mind.

***Dear Heavenly Father, you created us. You understand us. You provide everything we need, body, soul and spirit. We sometimes struggle to replace fear with all that you have for us. Holy Spirit, help us to meditate, feed and live on what is true. Thank you for your great love and faithfulness. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.***

Sunday 9 August 2020

# In the midst of chaos

by Rachael Stelzer

**'Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid' (Matthew 14:27).**

Read Matthew 14:22–33

The disciples are exhausted, and they’re scared. They have been rowing for hours, and they’re getting nowhere. The waves are threatening their boat.

And they’re on the sea. The place of chaos. The place of evil and dark spirits and fear. Jesus made them get into this boat. Where is he?

Maybe they don’t recognise their master because the Jesus who sent them onto the sea was weary, haggard and running on empty. The One who walks to them on the water is serene, balanced, and empowered. His prayer time up the mountain has re-energised and encouraged him. Or perhaps, despite his recent feeding of over 5000, the disciples still don’t believe that their teacher can walk on water.

Over their cries, Jesus calls to them, 'Take heart, it is I; have no fear'. Matthew’s Jewish readers would instantly hear echoes of God’s words to Moses. Jesus’ words could be translated, 'Take heart, I AM; don’t be afraid'.

I AM.

In Matthew’s Gospel, this story is meant to reveal who Jesus is. But that revelation is only possible in the midst of the chaos. If the disciples had not embarked on this frightening journey onto the Sea of Galilee, they would have missed the opportunity to see God revealed in their midst.

All around us, we can see chaos. We must confront the dangerous and deadly forces all around us. But in the midst of our fear, a voice speaks. 'Take heart, I AM; don’t be afraid.'

***Lord Jesus, wave walker: You come to us in our panic and our stress. Remind us that you are God, and you are for us. Take away our fear and help us to trust in you. Amen.***