****Sermon Transcript: Debbie Sellin, Bishop of Southampton**

**Week Two: The Feeding of the Five Thousand – Mark 6:30-44**

As a teenager, I was very inspired by Corrie ten Boom I was quite a young Christian and avidly reading books. And her book, “The Hiding Place”, was one that stuck with me for a very, very long time. ten Boom was a Christian living in The Netherlands, and she and her family housed Jews during the Second World War. They were discovered and Corrie and her sister Betsie and their father, were taken to a concentration camp.

In that camp, obviously things are very, very difficult. And Corrie speaks in her book about how challenging life was, but she also saw God at work in really powerful ways. And I want to share with you one of the stories that she told, the story of the vitamin bottle, and I'm reading her words here:

*Another strange thing was happening. The vitamin bottle was continuing to produce drops. It scarcely seemed possible, so small a bottle, so many doses a day. Now, in addition to Betsie, a dozen others on our pier were taking it.*

*My instinct was always to hoard it-Betsie was growing so very weak! But others were ill as well. It was hard to say no to eyes that burned with fever, hands that shook with chill. I tried to save it for the very weakest-but even these soon numbered fifteen, twenty, twenty-five. . . .*

*And still, every time I tilted the little bottle, a drop appeared at the top of the glass stopper. It just couldn’t be! I held it up to the light, trying to see how much was left, but the dark brown glass was too thick to see through.*

*Many nights I lay awake in the shower of straw dust from the mattress above, trying to fathom the marvel of supply lavished upon us. "Maybe," I whispered to Betsie, "only a molecule or two really gets through that little pinhole-and then in the air it expands!"*

*I heard her soft laughter in the dark. "Don’t try too hard to explain it, Corrie. Just accept it as a surprise from a Father who loves you."*

*And then one day Mien pushed her way to us in the evening food line. "Look what I’ve got for you!"*

*Mien was a pretty young Dutch women we had met in Vught, she was assigned to the hospital and often managed to bring to barracks 28 some stolen treasure from the staff room. A sheet of newspaper to stuff in a broken window, a slice of bread left untouched on a nurse's plate. Now we peered into the small cloth sack she carried.*

*"Vitamins!" I cried, and then cast an apprehensive glance at a camp policeman nearby.*

*"Yes!" she hissed back. "There were several huge jars. I emptied each just enough."*

*We gulped the thin turnip water, marvelling at our sudden riches. Back at the bunk I took the bottle of vitamins. "We’ll finish these drops first," I decided.*

*But that night, no matter how long I held it upside down, or how hard I shook it,*

*not another drop appeared.*

A miracle of provision.

And our passage today, the Feeding of the Five Thousand, is another miracle of provision, a very famous passage. You've probably read it many, many times you may have seen an artist's impression of what it might have looked like.

This is the only miracle that Jesus performed that features in all four Gospels. There are slightly different details in each one. But it obviously has great importance to be repeated so often.

In Mark's version, we read that the apostles have been spending time with Jesus. They've been learning from him. Time has moved on. And Jesus suggests that they go to a quiet place to rest. Mark notices that they haven't even had time to eat. So, they cross the lake only to find that the crowds have got there first.

And Jesus had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things.

Struck by this compassion, and its working, I began to think what is actually going on here. What is Jesus responding to? And firstly, Jesus meets a spiritual hunger. There is this image of these kinds of people rushing to hear from Jesus, people who had grown up with a faith and an understanding of God. And now Jesus was telling them new things. He was telling them things about a Kingdom that they could only begin to imagine. And they wanted to learn more and more. They wanted to know who he was, or they wanted to understand who God was.

And I wonder if we sense or are aware of a similar hunger in our own communities. So, we believe that people want to know that they have a longing for purpose for understanding.

Perhaps they don't think the Church is a place to turn to and they turn to other things that respond to that spiritual hunger.

Sadly, we don't have crowds and crowds of people rushing to our churches to hear the preacher following the preacher around wherever they go, just to get another little bit of insight and teaching.

But what would it look like for us to have compassion like Jesus did, to feed a spiritual hunger to help people learn to make the gospel relevant and to engage with them wherever they are?

I've always thought of the feeding of the 5000 was a practical miracle, but rereading this I realised that that first hunger was a spiritual hunger that Jesus does move on.

And we see that he has sympathy for the Apostles. We've already noted that they were already hungry. Now they've had to wait longer and longer.

But no, the Apostles look up and they see a huge crowd that they feel responsible for. How on earth are they going to feed all these people?

Quite naturally, they turn to Jesus for help. I guess they were hoping for a good solution from him and they may have been disappointed in his response. “You give them something to eat” he says. Certainly, I would have just been so shocked at that response, not knowing quite what to do overwhelmed by the needs of the people and the lack of provision.

**I guess Jesus saw that shock in the faces. And so he goes on further and he makes a

suggestion. See what you have. And so they look to find what they have.

But it's nowhere enough. They can find only five loaves and two fish.

For that's enough for Jesus. He takes the offering, he gives thanks for it, he blesses it, and he feeds the crowd with it. And we read that there are twelve baskets of leftovers.

So, a practical response to a practical need - a miracle played out in front of this crowd of people.

And I wonder what that did for the faith of the people in the crowd? Yes, their initial reaction was probably one of relief. They were all fed. Satisfied. And they could relax. But after they'd eaten, I wonder what the conversations would have been like?

There had been a sense of wondering who this man was what had happened. How had this miracle taken place?

I guess the place was buzzing and they'd want to know more.

Throughout his life, Jesus shows us the nature of God the Father, who belongs to provide for his people.

Corrie ten Boom saw a practical miracle that saved lives. Desperate need in that concentration camp, a miraculous provision. But through that, she also learned more about her Heavenly Father. Learnt more to trust him to cry out to him in need, and to believe that he would hear.

Jesus said that people were like sheep without a shepherd. God is our shepherd, a shepherd who provides for us, who leads us to good pastures, who helps us to walk in the good path, who protects us. Unless we trust in his goodness, so we can draw closer to him.

And that spiritual hunger can be fed as we know him as the Father more and more.

Let us pray.

God of our hopes and dreams. We are empty and long to be filled.

We are hungry and long to be fed.

We are lost and long to be found.

Gather us into your love and pick up the pieces of our lives, just as Jesus gather up the fragments of the five loaves and two fish that remained after feeding the 5000.

Call us a new to eat our fill, and to find our true nourishment in Jesus, the bread of heaven.

Amen.