

# WEEKLY SERMON

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## Two Feasts

Text here I've adopted a sort of 'oh, what on Earth now' attitude to the BBC News notifications I get on my phone. It feels endless.

We are grieving loved ones, lost time, missed opportunities, life-changing setbacks, profound injustice.

Everything is exhausting, overwhelming - where are our resources to continue such an uphill tread, and what would be the point against a monstrous, seemingly unstoppable tide of fear and frustration?

Well, the Gospel reading for this weekend is bittersweet. There are two different feasts in Matthew 14: Herod's infamous birthday banquet, at which John the Baptist is beheaded in a horrendous miscarriage of justice, and Jesus' feeding of the five thousand, set here immediately after Jesus has heard the terrible news of his cousin's death.

These feasts are as different as the people that hold them. Where Herod fears for his reputation among his influential guests, Jesus' love and compassion for the crowds of the poor, sick and the voiceless outweighs the exhaustion of grief. Where Herod puts a man to death, Jesus brings healing, sustenance and life.

The opulence and richness of a lavish celebration for an exclusive group of people is contrasted with a sparse, humble offering which, miraculously, feeds 5000 men, with thousands more besides.

Where Herod deflects culpability, Jesus takes responsibility and commands his disciples to do likewise. An earthly king's birthday party centres on a powerful, wealthy man who can demand anything for himself; while the King of the Universe gives of himself so thoroughly that all are fed through him, all are sustained in him and all are ultimately saved through his act of total self-emptying on the cross.

The temptation in times of immense frustration, pain, injustice and fear is to retreat and hide. Sometimes it is absolutely necessary to take time to heal.

But tantrum and indifference are luxuries in the face of need.

In his sorrow, Jesus acts: he responds to utter selfishness with utter gift, fuelled by the same love which brings such profound grief.

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This feeding, this act of rebellious love, subverts Herod's banquet and serves as a call to action for us now. That same love, compassion and grief we bear is funnelled into zeal for action, which despondency tries so hard to take from us.

The Good News is still the Good News, and the world needs it more than ever before - be fed, then go and feed.

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