

- So our Gospel reading this morning is an account of one of the most well known of Jesus' miracles:
 - the feeding of the five thousand.
- It's a story that is told across all four Gospels.
- Indeed, it is the only miracle story that is shared across all four gospels.
- So it's a story that may be pretty familiar to us.
- And it is an amazing story of God's compassion, God's provision, God's care for us in and through Jesus.
- It is also a story, like so many stories in Scripture, that connects us to other stories in scripture.
- The wilderness location and the miraculous provision of food reconnects us to the story of the Israelites eating manna in the wilderness as they journey from captivity in Egypt to freedom and a new home in the Promised Land.
- And, of course, the connections between those stories are not accidental.
- It is not the case that we just happen to have another story of food being provided in the wilderness -
 - "Oh, what a coincidence..."
- Rather, "food being provided in the wilderness" is actually *the* story of scripture as a whole,
 - because the story of scripture as a whole is the story of humans and indeed the whole of creation being brought back to life by God in the face of all the things that threaten us with death.
- So the story of scripture is the story of liberation and freedom from the things that oppress us and possess us;
 - it is the story of being rescued from the things that hold us in captivity;
 - it is the story of coming home from places and experiences of exile;
 - it is the story of reconnection, both with God and with each other, where before there was alienation;
 - it is the story of being found when we were lost;
 - it is the story of a path opening up before us when it seemed like there

- was no further place to go;
 - it is the story of resurrection,
 - the story of being brought from death to new life.
- In all of this, it is God's alternative story for the world;
 - the story that Jesus is always telling when he says "the kingdom of God has come near";
 - the story that is being told through him when God raises him from death,
 - the story that stands as a counter-story to all those other stories of hopelessness and despair and apathy and ennui that can threaten to take hold of us.
- And this story that we have heard this morning is an expression of that alternative story:
 - people being fed when they had nothing;
 - people experiencing God's abundance in the face of their fears of scarcity;
 - people experiencing God's provision when they have no resources to provide for themselves;
 - people being fed in the wilderness.
- But that story is not always easy to hear,
 - and it is not always easy to trust.
- How can we talk of God's provision when millions of people in the world still live in poverty,
 - still don't have enough to eat,
 - still don't have access to clean water,
 - still don't have a decent roof over their heads;
 - still don't have access to adequate education or healthcare?
- How can we talk of God's provision when the amount of money being spent on defence budgets around the world is easily enough to feed, clothe, house, educate and provide healthcare to every single person in the world?
- Where do we see God's provision in all of that?

- Well, I don't know about you, but I have two answers to that question.
- You may have others, but these are two that I think we are being invited to proclaim, to bear witness to in our lives.
- They may not seem like much in the face of all that is going on in the world but they are the answers that sustain me.

- And the first answer is:
 - that God raised Jesus from the dead.
- That's it.
- That's all I've got.

- But actually it's quite a lot!
- Because no one else...
 - no government or corporation,
 - no old boys network or political ideology,
 - no racist or misogynist or homophobic hate-mongering,
 - no division or bigotry or any of the other principalities or powers
 - ...has ever raised anyone from the dead.
- Only God has done that.
- Only God has the power of life.
- So it is God in whom I will put my trust.

- And what that means is that on my best days, I don't have to have all the answers to why the world is the way it is, even though I do wonder why.
- I don't have to despair that world peace probably won't come in my life-time, even though I wish it would.
- I don't have to descend into anger, bitterness and cynicism when I see the way people treat each other (or, at least, when I do descend into anger, bitterness, and cynicism, I don't have to stay there!)
- And I don't have to do all of that because God raised Jesus from the dead.
- God, and only God, did that.
- God, and only God, can do that.
- So, I'm going to follow Jesus and put my trust in God because that's where the life is.

- And that brings me to my second answer.

- And here it might seem like I'm having a bob each way!
- Believing in God, believing that God raised Jesus from the dead in the first place, can be a big ask.
- And it can be a big ask for precisely the reasons I was talking about before:
 - Global poverty,
 - Exploitation and oppression,
 - Violence, hatred and bigotry
- Where in the world is God when all of this is going on?
- How come, if God can raise Jesus from the dead, God can't sort all of that stuff out?

- And I don't have an answer to that or, at least, the answers I might offer are hardly satisfying.
- But the thing is, whether we can answer that question or not, all of us still get up in the morning and we still live our lives according to one story or another.
- Whether we can articulate it or not, we all follow someone or something.
- And I choose to follow Jesus, because the story of scripture, the story of Jesus, is the story that ignites my hope,
 - the story that makes sense of my life,
 - the story that speaks to me,
 - the story that calls me.
- And when you are called you follow.

- So I don't have any of the answers for the problems of the world, but I can follow Jesus, and I can, by God's grace, live more fully into the story of compassion and forgiveness and kindness and hope and justice and love and freedom that Jesus invites us into.