**The Ven Dr Amanda Bloor, Archdeacon of Cleveland, reflects on John 6:1-21 for the Ninth Sunday after Trinity, 28th July.**

I love the fact that so many of the stories of Jesus revolve around food. It's essential to life, of course. Without food and water, we die. But when you bring Jesus into the equation, there's always something more. Whether it's his first miracle at the wedding at Cana, the liturgical significance of the Last Supper, or, as in this reading, providing food for a tired, hot, and hungry crowd of 5000 people, Jesus takes the ordinary, everyday things and imbues them with wonder.

I've got a sack of barley flour here. Barley looks the same as wheat, but it's a more reliable crop, so it would probably be cheaper. It's tasty too, but it's low in gluten and so it doesn't rise much. I suspect that the barley loaves referred to in the story will more like flatbreads than the bread we’d recognise, and they wouldn't have been very big. I've had a go at making some.

Here's my effort - it turned out rather like pitta bread. But five of these simple barley loaves and two fish was probably enough to keep one small boy satisfied for the day, and possibly all that his family could afford. Yet the implication is that the boy, seeing the disciples beginning to worry, offered his lunch up to be shared. Or perhaps he received a few coins in return for those bread and that fish. But this is where the story gets interesting.

We might have expected Jesus to get everyone's attention, to wave his hands over the food, to ask God to multiply it, and to do a very public miracle. That would have impressed the crowd! But that sort of showy spectacle isn't his style. Jesus took the loaves and the fish, he gave thanks, and then just began to share them out. There was more than enough for all and 12 baskets full left over. That's a lot of food.

If you'd been at the back of that huge crowd, you probably wouldn't have known where the food came from. You couldn't have seen what happened. You’d just know that when you needed it, the teacher provided bread and fish - a simple, everyday, satisfying meal. You'd have felt happy to be eating in the company of others, sharing the same familiar food. You wouldn't have been sent away hungry.

When I read this, it doesn't seem to me so much to have been the sharing of food that impressed people, rather, it was the quantity that was left over, the sheer abundance of the gift that caused them to ask questions. I can imagine them talking about it on their way home at the end of the day, wondering about what had happened, how they had been fed, and what it meant. Who was this Jesus? Sometimes we can miss the exact moment when something amazing happens, and it's not until later that we reflect upon it and see God's hand there. I hope the questions that the crowd had led them to learn more about Jesus and recognise that he was special. He fed them with overflowing abundance, and he continues to feed us today.

Let's pray. Generous God, feed us not only with physical food, but with spiritual gifts too. Help us to trust in your abundant generosity and know that you will never send us away empty. Amen.