

Sunday 6th August 2023

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God is love, let us adore God by sharing God's love.

God is ever present, around us and within us, we worship together in God.

Story [I'm not your friend \(Sam McBratney\)](#)

Readings Genesis 32: 22-31 ([CEV](#))
Matthew 14:13-21

Reflection

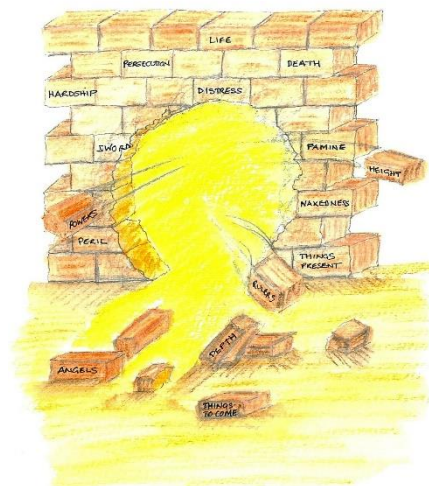
Today Matthew gives us his version of the feeding of the 5000. It is much simpler than the other gospels, pared back to the essentials. A simple statement of God's abundance, and a reminder that our simple efforts can become a part of that abundance when we work together. We can be guilty of transferring our experience onto God and I suspect we do it most with our understanding of God's love, seeing God as a super human only takes the abundance of God as love so far.

In the seventies there was a series of cartoons, the Love is..., cartoons that gave numerous definitions of God's love but even they only gave the merest glimpse of the magnitude that is God as love. The love that is God is unconditional and Paul writes about this in his letter to the Romans. In Chapter 8 we read-

³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Whilst training for ministry I took part in a month of guided prayer exercise which involved a weekly session with a guide. Through these sessions I discovered something I later developed in to a workshop called Prayer Imaging which involves studying a verse or passage until one line or a few words stand out and then creating an image that will remind you of what you were feeling about that passage. During that month one of my passages was these verses from Romans 8 and I created an image. Consistently throughout my imaging I have depicted God's presence as the colour yellow, and I know others who do the same. Have you ever thought about the colour you might associate with God's presence?

The image shows a wall made up of bricks depicting some of the things which my be thought to keep us from God's love, and the wall being blown away by the power of God's love. We each have our own fears, worries and guilt which we might see as coming between us and God's love.



For Jacob it was the guilt he felt over his actions in taking Esau's birthright. Jacob's life was anything but straightforward after that. He lived in exile for a long time and was himself cheated by Laban when he asked for Rachel's hand in marriage which we read of in Genesis 29. His relationship with Laban is fraught to say the least. Jacob hears God telling him he must restore his relationship with Esau but the last time Jacob saw Esau was when he cheated him and Esau was very angry. Jacob imagines how he would feel if the roles were reversed and in the best human tradition transfers these feelings onto Esau and it only increases his fear.

When we fall out with a friend or our family it is very isolating, we feel alone despite our bravado at the time of the disagreement but making up can be difficult. We dwell on things and create a picture based on assumptions and our own feelings we create monsters in the dark. Just like in the story of the fox who chose to exile himself from his mother and imagines monsters everywhere. This is how fear grows and walls are built for we cannot see anyway that God could forgive what we have done and forget the unconditional nature of God' love.

Jacob hears God's command and he plans how he can approach Esau and make him listen, for Jacob is sorry for what he has done. He decides he will send messengers to Esau telling him something of his story and how he now has wives, family and animals but when the messengers return they say Esau is coming to meet

Jacob with 400 men. Now there are many ways Jacob could have interpreted that but he chose to see it as a threat because he imagined Esau to still be angry.

He decides to divide his camp into two and send one half ahead. If they are ambushed by Esau then the other half will see and can escape but before he actions this he spends time praying with God and during his prayer he remembers God's promise to be with him and to build a nation from his family. Putting his faith in this he instead selects animals and servants to travel ahead and when they meet Esau to tell him they are a gift from Jacob then he settles down for the night.

Our reading tells how he awakes in the middle of the night and escorts the remainder of his family and animals across the river Jabbok before returning and wrestling with a stranger. We are not told who the stranger is, maybe one of those monsters of the imagination, but in the end Jacob is convinced he has wrestled with God. One of the striking points of this story for me is that it appears throughout the wrestling that Jacob is the antagonist for it is the stranger who says as dawn approaches 'let me go', do not hold onto me.' Perhaps this is a lesson about not holding on to the feelings that build walls but instead let go and believe in the presence of God with us. It seems to make a difference for Jacob and I suspect would make a difference for each one of us.

There is a wisdom story told of two neighbours who quarrelled and refused to speak to each other. One day the Spirit of Spite whispered into the first neighbour's ear, 'let's dig a trench between our land and your neighbour's land so that he can never get across.' And so, a deep trench came to separate the two neighbours and the second neighbour became even angrier at the action.

The Spirit of Spite pleased with her day's work approached the second neighbour and suggested he build a high fence on his boundary so that he no longer had to see his neighbour. The second neighbour employed a travelling carpenter to build the fence. The carpenter realised where the problem lay and while the second neighbour went to market he set about his task using the wood, nails, hammer and saw that the farmer had given him.

When the farmer returned he was shocked to find not a fence but a bridge across the trench. However, before he admonish the carpenter he saw his neighbour walking across the bridge with his hand outstretched. He said that despite his actions in digging the trench his neighbour had shown friendship in creating a beautiful bridge. He offered the hand of friendship suggesting they forget their differences and build a new relationship of friendship rather than just being neighbours. They shook hands and as they turned to cement their friendship by sharing food they saw the carpenter walking away. They invited him to stay and share with them but he declined saying that he many more bridges to build.

We are called to build the kingdom by reflecting our experience of God's love into the world. If we limit our experience of God' love through assumptions and transference of our own emotions then we are not building the Kingdom of God, but a pale human imitation. When we remember God is always with us and God's love is unconditional then we are encouraged to live a very different sort of love.

A love that does not make assumptions, a love that listens, a love that accepts, a love that overcomes.

Love is a bridge over the chasm of fear. Let us be carpenters of love.