

# Sunday Worship for 11th July 2021

## The Sixth Sunday after Trinity

### Godparents' Sunday

#### SERMON

*Ven Hilary Dawson, Archdeacon of Gloucester*

Today is Godparents Sunday, a wonderful opportunity to give thanks for the care of godparents for their godchildren, and for the dedication they show to them. And one of the ways that we're being encouraged to celebrate Godparents Sunday this year is to come together for a picnic, families and friends and church communities coming together to share food, conversation, fun, and laughter, a great way to celebrate the ministry of godparents. And it's really good to be speaking outside Gloucester Cathedral in these beautiful gardens that have been created over the last few years, truly a place where people come to be together and to picnic and enjoy one another's company. And as we think about the reading we've heard today from John's Gospel, the feeding of the 5,000, it is of course perfect for picnics. It is completely apposite, and it's interesting to note, of course, that the picnic baskets at the feeding of the 5,000 are those which gather up the abundant leftovers, rather than those that bring the picnic because what is the feeding of the 5,000, except an extraordinary abundant picnic with Jesus right at its heart. But you might be wondering what the relevance of our reading today is to Godparents Sunday.

So often when we reflect on one of Jesus's miracles, we will quite rightly start with the person of Jesus. We'll start with Jesus' words and Jesus' actions, and the impact that has on the community, the way it can transform a community. But today, I want to start with the child, and the first thing we notice, which of course is obvious, is the child arrives here with a picnic. The child has bread and fish, and for me, that speaks of somebody in the background who cares for the physical and material needs of the child. Someone has made sure that the child has all that they need for the day ahead. And then we notice the instincts of the child. The child is generous and kind and compassionate. The child notices what's going on around him. The child speaks up when he needs to and acts when he needs to. The child sees the needs of others and uses what he has to address those needs. And then, of course, we realise that the child is present in the heart of the crowd, in the company of the people following Jesus. The child isn't on the edge, the child is at the centre. And as I write this little backstory for the child in my head, I wonder how the child came to be there.

Did the child arrive with family, or with friends? Or did he simply make his way there out of sheer curiosity, wanting to know a little bit more about this man, Jesus? So if we think about godparents, so often godparents are those who want to support the material and physical needs of the godchild.

So often they are those who want to accompany and be alongside their godchild, to encourage them in their gifts and talents, to help them to flourish and be the person they can be in the present and the future. And so often, we hope and long for godparents to be those who bring their godchildren right into the heart of communities that are surrounding Jesus Christ, that they will find out for themselves the extraordinary love and care that comes from God in Jesus.

We often talk about children being the future of the world, or the future of the church, and on one level, of course they are the future of the world and the future of the church. But they are also the present of the world and the present of the church. What this miracle shows us beyond anything else is that the children matter, what they do now matters. The feeding of the 5,000 would not happen without the child being there to share the gifts that he has. So on this Godparents Sunday, we give thanks for godparents all over the world for what they do for and with their godchildren, but we give thanks, too, for all those who accompany us through life, those who encourage us and care for us. We give thanks for them all.

Amen.