

## Walking with Micah: sermon

The *Walking with Micah* project is helping the Methodist Church in Britain to explore what it means to be a justice-seeking church. This sermon is one of the resources you can use within your church to support engagement with the project.

The sermon was written by Andy Dye, a local preacher who supports the Methodist Church in Britain's work with global church partners. Prayers and an all-age worship address are also available, as are hymn and other resources on the Singing The Faith Plus worship planning hub, to support preachers or leaders of local arrangement services..

After the service you could invite people to take part in an activity to explore justice in greater depth and submit answers via an e-survey. Alternatively you can ask people to fill in the "What do you think" postcards which are available from Methodist Publishing in packs of 50. Visit [www.methodist.org.uk/walking-with-micah-justice-conversations/](http://www.methodist.org.uk/walking-with-micah-justice-conversations/) for more details and ideas.

### God's Justice: Liberation, Provision and Presence

#### *A sermon to introduce the Walking with Micah Project Justice Conversations*

#### John 6:1-21 and Micah 6:8

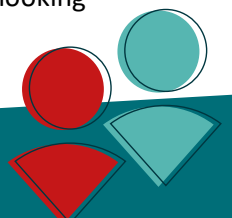
*This sermon begins with the image of Eularia Clarke's painting, The Five Thousand, one of the pictures in the Methodist Art Collection. You can download the image from [here](#) and might want to project it or share a copy in another way.*

Have you ever had a church picnic?

The Methodist Church owns a wonderful picture. The artist, Eularia Clarke, has pictured the feeding of the five thousand as a church "fish and chip" picnic. Can you imagine? I love that image.

There is food, community and fun. The story of the feeding of the five thousand is in all the gospels in some form or another. Typically, the gospel of John has so much theological meaning throughout the telling of the story. It is a situation drenched with theology, an explanation layered with theology, and which leads on to even more theology later in the chapter (though we are only looking at this first section of John Chapter 6 today).

**WALKING**  
WITH  
**MICAH**



The whole chapter is framed with this phrase – *‘Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near’* (v4, NRSV). So the first listeners and readers and we ourselves, should have our minds cast back to that great story of Israel. The story of Moses, the slavery of Hebrew people in Egypt, the promise of freedom, the introduction of God’s name – the I AM – the plagues, the Passover meal, the flight from Egypt, Manna in the desert and crossing the red sea with the stormy waves around...

So through setting the story in the context of the Passover, John gives us a frame of reference for the telling of the feeding of the five thousand. With that frame perhaps we can see these things:

- The feeding of the five thousand as a liberation meal
- The provision for all
- The presence of God with us in the storm

### **Liberation meal**

The Passover meal that is celebrated to this day marks the liberation of the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt. Freedom.

And John here seems to be making that connection – a community meal, gathering people together with Jesus – there is a work of liberation happening and about to happen.

It is Freedom Day!

I wonder how that phrase sits with you?

During the pandemic we had some so-called freedom days. Days when lockdowns were lifted, when we could return to coffee shops, to pubs, to work.

Yet freedom for some meant fear for others. Those vulnerable to infection, those with vulnerable family members, those simply concerned about their health.

While some were so glad to be out and about, others were afraid, and confined and concerned.

Who is freedom for? It has always been a difficult question. In the story of the liberation of the Israelites, what did it mean for the ordinary Israelites? What did it mean for the ordinary Egyptians? What did it mean for those with power and wealth in Egypt? All would have had their own experiences.

And where do we ourselves sit in the liberation story? Do we think of ourselves as the tribe of Hebrews? Some of us will have experienced liberation, and for some of us this is ongoing as we seek security, home and rights. But for many of us, should our wealth, our economics, our history actually make us realise we are the Egyptian power?

Martin Luther King said this:

*‘No one is free until we are all free’*

How do you respond to this?

It's certainly very challenging. It reminds us that our liberation is bound up in the liberation of others. I may be free to buy cheap clothes, but these depend on slave wages for others. I may be free to drive or fly, but the seas continue to rise for the people of Fiji. I may be free to indulge in racist or sexist "banter", but others experience discrimination and harassment.

Justice and liberty cannot not be based on my own selfish expectations of what I should and should not be able to do. Rather they must flow from the lived experience for all human beings and all creation on this planet.

We are only truly free, things are only truly just, when we are all free and we all experience justice. Anything else is the illusion that privilege, power and money creates.

Jesus shows us what true liberation is like. It is not about individualistic or nationalistic self-determination. It is about the freedom and justice of love. And we see clues of that in the fish and chip meal, of five thousand eating together.

- We see it in the small gift and the small person who is centred and included in what they bring. The most 'insignificant' are the more significant, the last shall be first, this is God's just kingdom economy.
- We see it in the way that all share in the food – those in the middle, those on the edge, all who sit there are included, there's no measure of faith or statement of belief to sign up to.

This is a justice-filled liberation, showing up God's kingdom as inclusive, sharing and re-centred on 'the small'.

How do our freedom days measure up? How does our world measure up?

So firstly this story, and the framing of it within the liberation of the Israelites, tells us about what true freedom, true liberation looks like in God's kingdom.

### Provision

Secondly it tells us about provision for all.

*(The preacher may wish to purchase a packet of Wotsits here or show some on the screen)*

Why do we have a pack of Wotsits? After leaving Egypt, the Hebrews wandered in the desert and they were hungry. God provided them with food, a kind of bread. It was called Manna – which literally means "What is it?" Wotsit!

And in the reading from John, the gospel writer reminds us of the echo of that Manna, in this feeding of the thousands...

In the desert place where the Hebrews were with Moses – God provides.

In the grassy place where the thousands are with Jesus – God provides.

John even emphasises that this crowd of people are God's people by telling us about the twelve baskets of leftover food: these twelve baskets corresponding to the twelve tribes of the Hebrews.

WOTSIT? "What is going on?" they asked in the desert. And no doubt they asked the same on the grassy plain.

It's a miracle of course.

But what is going on today in places like Yemen or Tigray or London or Venezuela? What is this miracle? Where is this miracle God? How can we faithfully proclaim the good news of Jesus for all whilst living in a world of inequality and hunger?

Jesus shows us the way in v 11 as he distributes the bread and fish:

*Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted.*

Jesus is with us by his Spirit and the Spirit is working with each and every one of us. The truth is that Jesus can do the same miracle today through us, his hands and his feet. In a world where there is plenty, we have the power to share it out.

Famines are not natural phenomena, they are catastrophic political failures. Can we be part of a miracle to change that?

In a world where one-third of all the food we buy goes to waste – can we do a miracle and share it out?

In a country where hundreds of thousands are relying on foodbanks - can we participate in a new miracle of distribution with dignity?

In a world where millions need vaccinations while high-income countries destroy out-of-date stocks could we see a miracle and see vaccine-sharing across the world for all?

There is that phrase uttered early in scripture – 'Am I my brother's keeper?' (Genesis 4 v9 ) – and the answer throughout scripture is this – YES! – look after your sister, look out for your brother, love your neighbour, love your enemy, be a part of the community of creation not an extractor of wealth! Be part of a community that can model a new way of sharing, of distributing – one that doesn't rely on charity, however needed that may be at times, but relies simply on the truth that we are all made in the image of God, all cherished, all part of one family of God's creation, all with something to contribute like the little boy with a few simple items.

The miracle of distribution Jesus calls us into is one that is radically different to the present day idolatry of market economics or the human failure of Marxist experiments. It is the kingdom of the family, to join in the dance of the Creator, Son and Spirit, a community of creation, where we experience ongoing conversion in our discipleship as we seek to model a community in the shape of the Kingdom.

It is a Kingdom, which models provision and justice for all. Which extends to our global neighbours. Which includes all creation in justice and peace.

Of course we don't measure up to this, although we may see glimpses, we never have and we need constantly start over.

But the miracle is with us. WOTSIT?

It is being the hands and feet of Jesus .

It is loving kindness.

It is loving in the power of the Spirit

And it is also receiving the provision that we so desperately need in this place and this country and this church. Not just physical but spiritual. From the community around us. What do we need in this church today – I wonder what our neighbours would say – or how they would help?

God's miracle of provision is about you and me loving one another in action, not just words.

### Presence

And finally we learn about God's presence with us

After the food, John takes us to the sea. A perfect weekend treat! Of course we can think back to that frame that John gives us, Passover and the story of liberation.

The Hebrews walked through the stormy sea on dry land and it crashed back together killing the Egyptian army.

In this story given by John, the sea that the disciples face was not the same sea as the Hebrew people faced, but no less tricky to cross unless you have a boat The disciples get in to the boat and start to cross.. Jesus joins them later while they are in the middle of a storm and naturally, they are terrified. Do not be afraid! Jesus utters – not easy when you have just seen your friend walk on water!

But in the storm Jesus is with them

In crossing the Red Sea, the Hebrew people knew God was with them.

And we know Jesus as Emmanuel - God with us.

This is the wonderful promise of scripture and is made physical reality in Jesus.

God present in the midst of creation.

God forever connected with creation in Jesus now risen. Forever.

Another link given to us by John in the words of Jesus. When Jesus says 'It is I,' - that "It is" I can also be translated as 'I AM' – the name of God given to Moses.

I AM God, I am near, do not be afraid!

God was present with the disciples, God is present with us. Jesus invites us today to travel with him and to learn with him.

So we learn of

**God's**

**Liberation of us**

**Provision for us**

**Presence with us**

What difference does that make?

I [Andy] worked for 6 years in a high school. It was a tough school to be in; many other schools nearby had more income and were better cared for. A boy was stabbed two years before I started there and fights happened daily. Kids would carry sharp things to protect themselves, and I even remember coming close to phoning the police one day when my class would not stop throwing stones at each other – in the classroom!

Yet it was a place also full of love, justice and commitment. I knew teachers who would get up at 3.30 in the morning to make sandwiches to raise funds for the school I knew others who would bring extra lunch for the children who did not have any. There were children looking out for one another, full of creativity, ideas and brilliance. The staff would laugh together, cry together and pray together on a regular basis.

Perhaps you have experienced something similar; perhaps it is at this church.

Jesus was with us in that community, as we shared God's provision looking out for one another, as we experienced the wonder of God's liberation through education and as we wept and knew God's presence in storms too difficult to bear. He brought us with a bump to the other side.

One day – one young man returned to school – I will call him Peter – who had been one of the most difficult students. He had caused me some interesting times! He visited a few years after being with us. To thank us, to share with us how he felt like God had worked with him.

That miracle fed us and it's that miracle of God's liberation, provision and presence that feeds us today.

The prophet Micah, writing in the 8<sup>th</sup> Century BC, reminded God's people of their covenant with God, saying '*and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?*'

As Methodists we believed that we are called to challenge injustice as part of Our Calling. What does this mean for us, for you, today? How can we live this out through the Methodist Way of Life? The new **Walking with Micah** project is exploring what it means to be a justice-seeking church

today. As part of this there are opportunities for you to participate in a conversation, to say what really matters to you. For more information search Walking with Micah on the website.

*[Choose which is appropriate: Postcards to send your views in are available after the service or someone will be leading a group conversation and all are welcome to join.]*

Today Jesus calls us in to the Kingdom of liberation and justice. How can we “do justice”? Perhaps starting by taking some practical steps to centre our communities on the ‘small’ or to make the things we are already doing truly just and inclusive?

Today Jesus calls us into the kingdom of provision and kindness. How could we find ways to provide in true loving kindness? Ways that see dignity for all. Ways that rely, not on charity, but on a true miracle of distributing what we all have in creation’s resources?

Today Jesus calls us to know that God is with us and to walk humbly with him, learning from his example and growing as learners in community together through the difficulties and joys ahead.

Amen.

***You may want to invite people to respond to the Word by reflecting on these questions***

In what ways are we as individuals or as a church doing justice, working for liberation or provision already? How might we pick up on the “clues” of this story to reflect on what we’re doing – or what we might do in the future?

How can we make sure that the smallest are at the centre and that everyone is included?

How can we make provision for all that shifts us from one-way charity to dignity, which enables us to both give and receive)?

Where do you see Jesus present today? How can you walk with Jesus in humility and seek justice and kindness?

Imagine our society or world as God wants it to be, just, fair, life-giving. What do you think are the most important actions needed to move towards that world?