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Dear Friends,

A sample bottle of hand gel
Five loaves and two fish (Matthew 14.13-21)

Alex and April, two young GPs were due to be married in Christ Church on 23rd May 2020 - many of you will remember meeting them and hearing their banns called in Christ Church. For months they had looked forward to their special day and imagined walking back down the aisle, a married couple united by their love for each other, to the delight of their 150 or so guests. It was not to be. On 15th March I called their banns for a third time and at the end of the service they pressed into my hands a little urine sample bottle filled with hand gel! Only the previous week when their banns were called for a second time we had discussed the shortage of hand gel and my plan to use my supply of veterinary Hibiscrub as Covid-19 began to take a hold. We giggled as I received their gift and they commiserated as I told them I would not be able to board a flight the following morning for my own son's wedding celebrations in Switzerland as that country had suddenly gone into lockdown. Within a week Alex and April's own wedding plans had to be changed. Initially they resolved to be married with a tiny number of people present as originally permitted but then tragically with the death rate rising the government and Church in Wales instructed us to close our churches. Yet come what may they resolved to be wed sooner rather than later and today in the presence of only around 20 people they were married to the delight and applause of all of us who were present. There was hardly a dry eye as April and her father followed by bridesmaids glided down the aisle to the haunting melody of Saint Saen's, The Swan. Our hearts were lifted as bells rang out to announce their marriage. Fees were waived by generous musicians. I have promised to do the same next year when they return for their marriage to be blessed and celebrated in the presence of all those who could not be here today. I cannot quite describe how, like the loaves and fishes, that little bottle of hand gel passed to me by two doctors working on the front line, melted my heart and led to such compassion and generosity by the followers of Jesus

Over the past thirty or so years each time I have told "The feeding of the five thousand" in schools and churches I've tried to share a sense that Jesus didn't work alone but with the help of ordinary men, women and yes even children when he invited them to share the little they had with others. Yet one incident stands out in my mind each time I hear this story. For some years prior to ordination I was part of a "Family Service Team" - we would prepare a family friendly act of worship that often involved children taking part and we would lead the Family Service once a month. Peter, one of our team, was brilliant at DIY, he would make our staging, our props and sometimes our costumes. I cringe as I remember some of our offerings but this was perhaps the worst. Somehow he convinced us that to aid our retelling of the multiplication of the loaves and fish he would make something like an electric cannon that would generate bread soon after the child dressed as Jesus had "looked up to heaven, blessed and broken the loaves" I will never forget the grinding noise when Peter's machine stalled then seemed to explode and what seemed like tons of pitta bread was fired into the front rows of an unsuspecting congregation. What fools we were, for we made Jesus seem like some sort of magician not a compassionate man who had initially tried to escape the crowds for a bit of peace. When Jesus' disciples ask him to send the crowds away to buy themselves food he rounds on his closest friends saying, "you feed them". The task seems impossible for they have just five loaves and a couple of fish to share with thousands, but after Jesus has taken them, blessed them and broken the loaves he gives this small offering back to them so they can share it with others. The disciples become the agents through whom God's gifts are shared and served to hungry people. That is not magic but it is a miracle; it is a divine feast, a sign of God working in and through people like us.

As I sat down to type this article the door bell rang and an envelope was pushed through the letter box "a little gift for those in need" from a woman on her way home from working in the NHS; her generosity will be felt by others. Day after day, the red bin outside The Rectory is filled with a few tins or jars, yet when we bag up the food on Monday we always find more than enough to feed the hungry families of Radyr. Those twelve baskets full of broken pieces left over from the picnic in Matthew's gospel spring to mind.

In John's gospel there is no Last Supper meal, no bread broken and no wine shared but only a feeding of the crowds after a young lad offers to share his five barley loaves and two little fishes. I have often wondered why John chooses to include this detail - did he see that the presence and gifts of children were

transformative in the life of the early church. Thank God nothing has changed. Daniel is only 11, he attends church each week and despite being confirmed already enjoys being part of our confirmation group. When I shared with the youngsters the huge loss of income due to Covid and our need for a new church boiler he began painting and selling ceramic hearts to raise funds and then he set up a Just Giving page link https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/christ-church-radyr?utm_term=dpzxVmJYV Perhaps this young lad like the boy with the loaves and fish will inspire you to look at his giving page and be generous this week. He's raised over £1600 pounds - lets double that to ensure we are warm this winter.

At each wedding we pray that the couple's marriage will be life long and life giving and that their home will be a place of generous welcome to others. Many weeks before I introduce the peace (which sadly we cannot exchange physically with each other right now) I say words from scripture, "God is love, and those who live in love live in God and God lives in them". When we stand in the presence of a couple much in love with each other I dare to believe that I'm standing in God's presence. When I rub shoulders with those who make sacrifices, offer generous hospitality and give unstintingly I also sense I'm in God's presence and now and again their generosity rubs off on me. That's the story of Jesus, it is the life of God's Christ and now and again when we actually live the generous Eucharistic life its mine and yours too.

With my love and prayers,

Vicki

