

Reading: John 6:1-13

Theme: What are they among so many?

This morning is our shoebox Sunday service which is given to Blythswood Care. There are a number of full shoeboxes (X2) here, but none of them of the size of the shoeboxes for my shoes (13), nor our son Daniel (15). They certainly are not the size of the boxes for the shoes of Carl Griffiths from South Wales who has biggest feet in Wales, maybe the UK taking a size 21 (14.5 inches) but he is only 6'5" tall; his feet look small compared to Brahim Takioullah whose size 23 feet are 15 inches long and he is the second tallest person alive in the world at 8'1" – here is a photo of him with world's smallest woman, who has the smallest woman's feet. His feet are small compared to Matthew McGrory who was only 7' 6" tall but he had size 29 feet, measuring 16.73" long. These are all dwarfed by Robert Wadlow who was 8'11" tall, took size 36 shoes measuring 17" long. His shoebox would take a lot of filling!

Yet even if we had this largest of shoeboxes, we cannot really get that much in. Yes, we could make it look very festive and not just a plain shoebox. These ones here are now filled with good things hopefully suitable for the age of the boy, girl or adult we have chosen to fill it for. In 8 days, they will be collected and then on their way eventually to somewhere in Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Kosovo, Moldova, Romania, Serbia or Ukraine. and when they arrive there will be children and adults who will

appreciate the contents of their box and it will, hopefully, please and thrill them. Many of the children receiving these Christmas shoeboxes will be excited and view them as special treats and presents for them, for we are not sending them the necessities of life. What they will get will hopefully make their lives more pleasant and put a smile on their faces.

Yet the overall life situation of the children and adults will not dramatically change because of these things. One shoebox sent to one person in a different country is not really much in the great scheme of things. Yet since 1993 Blythswood Care, when they started sending out shoeboxes (*only 300 that year*), until Covid has gave out on average 120,000 and in 2016 they aimed to have provided, in total, 2 million Christmas shoeboxes to people, so by now are aiming at 2.5 million. We can only imagine the joy they bring. These have probably not made a big impact in their lives, but did make a positive impact. It would be so easy to question about our boxes "*What are they among so many?*" Yet if you go on the Blythswood Care website you can see and read of the difference they make and have made in both young and older lives. It is incredible that such a simple thing as a shoebox stuffed with treats and good things can have such an amazing cumulative effect.

We may wonder if our lives will make, are making or have made any difference where we are in our lives. Our lives

can seem, at times to us, so insignificant and we wonder what we really can contribute to things around us and in the big scheme of things. Yet we are to realise that God does not consider anyone of us as insignificant, but each and every one of us are precious to Him - as we are all made in the image of God – we all carry God’s image to God as we have eternal God given souls. As such we have a potential beyond our appreciation to be able to be of benefit to others and to glorify God. Sadly because of mankind’s state – we are in a state of rebellion and against God and His ways, we also have the potential for great wrong and evil too. Let’s focus on the potential that God can use for good and His glory by using the verses from John 6:5-13. Briefly see 5 things:

1. Great Need (v5)

What a situation – well over 5,000 people there - as only the number of the men are noted; other gospel accounts supply the fact that there were also women and children present. Interesting that men were keen to follow and hear Jesus. He was a man who could relate to and affect other men; He was a blokey sort of guy and not some wimp. This large crowd had been following Jesus to hear what He taught, but also hoping to see miracles (signs). Yet here Jesus is concerned for them – had compassion on them as they had followed Him, but had little to eat. Here was an enormous need – people needed food; if they went off home they could have fainted through lack of food as they were in remote area. The need was real and great.

2. Great Test (v5 & 7)

Jesus asked Philip about getting food for them - where they could buy bread for them to eat!?! There were no takeaways, no MacDonalD's, no supermarkets and the like locally. Philip immediately did a quick sizing up of the situation and reckoned it would take well over half a year's wages for a labourer to give that lot just a bite of food (*denarius = 1 days pay for a labourer and they'd work 6 days a week, so just over 33 weeks', 8 months' wages - about £24k in modern money*). Now the need is quantified more for us and this was a test to Philip – not so much to his maths and logistics, but his faith in the way that Jesus, as the Son of God, could provide this food. Yet He asked Philip - to test him - even though Jesus knew what He would do (v6). At times the Lord Jesus (x2) can challenge us, test our faith too. We can be faced with situations that are beyond our human abilities and resources as a church or an individual and we feel there is no way this can be done; we can't do it, can't carry on, are unable to see any way forward let alone bring it to completion. Perhaps the Lord is testing us, calling on us to risk much and step out in faith and obedience. Maybe He is challenging someone here to trust Him as our own Saviour. You know what you are like and may feel so useless, life seems so hopeless and feel you are in a sorry state before Him, feeling you cannot deal with the wrong and guilt in your life – it is too much and too large. In fact, any wrong in our life is too much for us to deal with;

we cannot deal with its guilt and deserved condemnation at all. Will we realise that only the Lord Jesus can deal with such for us and so go to Him as our only hope?

3. Great Question (v8 & 9)

Andrew is nearby and has heard the question to Philip, perhaps even the boy, literally a little boy, heard it too and the boy offered his small packed lunch to Andrew to offer to Jesus – maybe thinking Jesus was hungry and his lunch, pack up, snap would be willingly given to Jesus. Andrew offers it, but asks “*What are they among so many?*” (- the reading of a number of versions); NIV says “*how far will they go among so many?*” To be honest it wasn’t much – the packed lunch of a little boy – 5 small barley bread buns and a couple of sardines! The resources seemed useless, the need was great and the disciples questioned what, if anything could be achieved. It seemed useless and not worth bothering. We can feel like that about our situations and lives, about the lives and situations of others, but we are to do as this boy did, as Andrew did – bring what they had to the Lord Jesus.

The boy gave his limited resources to Jesus to use, as meagre as they seemed. Andrew went to Jesus and told Him of the boy and what he offered. We are to bring our lives, all they have or don’t have, all we are, and as we are, for the Lord Jesus to take and use as He will. We can pray for others in their situations, even as they are looking to use their lives for Jesus – bring them to Him in prayer.

We are not to force people to do this or that, but as God is working in their lives, so we can pray with them and for them to know the Lord's help, will and leading. All the small resources this boy had was given and brought to the Lord Jesus, but what could He do with them?

4. Great Provision. (v10-13)

The Lord Jesus took control and had the disciples get the people to sit down in groups of hundreds and fifties (Mark 6:40) - this probably made it easier to count how many there would be and give the food out. As all the people did this, Jesus took the loaves and fishes and gave thanks. The bread and the fishes were then given to the disciples to give out to the crowds. Amazingly they kept on giving and giving and giving, possibly even giving out seconds and thirds! Everyone had as much as they wanted of both the bread and the fish. Then the Lord Jesus instructed His disciples to gather up all that was left so that nothing was wasted and they filled 12 baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves and fish left over by those who had eaten.

We need to realise the Lord Jesus is God the Son with a real human body and He had amazing power over creation while on earth. He could change water into wine, He could walk on water, He could heal the sick of diseases, cast demons out of people, He could raise people from the dead and all these miracles were signs pointing to who He truly was. Here He underlines the truth that He is God and

the Creator God and so He created barley bread in a miraculous way and people ate bread made from barley that had never grown; they ate the fish that had never swum in any lake or sea! Even the very limited resources given to Jesus did not restrict Him. He made this great provision, so much so that everyone could eat as much as they wanted and there was still this incredible amount left over.

5. Great Encouragement.

We may feel that our lives, what we have achieved or could achieve are as nothing, feel that what we are, have and can give or do is not much. We may ask with Philip *“What are they among so many?”* We may feel that our lives amount to nothing – all that we have done, are doing and could possibly do in the future. Yet when we trust the Lord Jesus as our Saviour, none of us knows what He will achieve in and through us or what He can make us. We may live quiet, even obscure Christian lives and yet if those lives are given over to the Lord Jesus for His glory, then we don't know what He can achieve in and through them. You see the Lord Jesus can use us in our service for Him, even use our suffering hard times or adversity for Him in remarkable ways. We do not have to live spectacular and marvellous lives in the public eye to be used in a mighty way for Him. It is not so much great abilities that the Lord Jesus looks for, but being like Jesus, coupled with a great love and devotion to Him so that we can be used in whatever way our loving Saviour knows is

best. Giving our lives to the Lord Jesus for Him to be our Saviour will change us – for we will realise He loves us so much that He sent heaven’s best to rescue us and make a way for us to heaven. When He is our Saviour – however young or as old as we are, He can use us in unexpected ways to do so much good to others around us.

That is why something small like these shoeboxes can be used in remarkable ways in people's lives as we send them not only with our love and concern, but wanting to show the love and concern of the Lord Jesus to others, even to those we do not know. I pray that in our lives there would be a multiplying of blessings to others as we lovingly, willingly give our lives over to the service and use of this wonderful Saviour called Jesus.