



Trinity 9

THE NEW SHOFAR

“feeding” the hungry is what God expects of believers

2 Kings 4:42-44 - John 6:1-15

“Give it to the people and let them eat”

Chapter 4 of **2 Kings** presents a range of amazing actions by the prophet Elisha – filling containers with oil, assisting a family in conceiving a son, raising a boy from the dead, stopping poisonous food from being deadly and now, feeding a multitude. The point being made is clear. It is not so much about the role of Elisha as a prophet, though that is important. What the editors are stressing is how God is always at work among his people, always offering signs of the divine presence. Israel is never alone. The covenant is never irrelevant. Human history remains a part of divine saving history, so that all that happens on the earth contain insights into the ways of God. The prophet’s role is to highlight who God is and what God is doing. In our present narrative, God is the *God-who-feeds* his people.

For the editors of **1 and 2 Kings**, God is at work in creation. Yahweh the God of Israel is also engaged with the nations of the earth, bringing all men and women to his own divine goals. The nations will resist but in the end heaven’s plans will prove to be victorious. This victory will be achieved through what God does in Israel his people and in the works of his chosen ones, the prophets. This is why there are so many seemingly unimportant and complicated details and stories. Nothing and no one is irrelevant to God; no one too sinful, too faithless, too ignorant or too unimportant in the eyes of the world that they cannot be used for divine purposes.

Men and women of faith need to “get their hands dirty” for the works of God

What we see here is the prophet engaging directly in the needs of God’s people. He is not simply there for religious things, for spiritual activities. People are hungry. They need food. God feeds them. For the editors, faithful living must engage with the world at this level before it can go off preaching and teaching a purely theological message. Hungry people need more than fine words. Suffering people are looking for much more than just a vague promise of something off in the future. Refugees live in expectation of more than fellowship, they deserve and want a welcome, seek love and friendship.

All of these amazing stories about the works of the prophet are insights into God’s concern for his creatures. It worries God when a widow has run out of oil, when a child dies, or when people are so poor they are unable to survive the pains and torments the world throws up. The prophet is not just with them in their sufferings, he does something about them. He addresses their needs. He feeds, raises, provides and acts. He does this through his prophets, through believers.

This is where these Books of Kings are so important for Christians today. It is a reminder of how Jesus did a great deal more than pray, teach, preach and exhort. He acted for the good of the poor and the suffering. He brought peace. He tackled hunger. He spoke for those without a voice and embraced those marginalized and despised by the mighty and the self-righteous. A faith without action is no real faith and a Church without direct engagement with the “hungry” is far from the ways of God.

Produced by Bishop Michael Hough for the Disciples of Christ -

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Jesus is the way to be free of all that seeks to imprison

For John, Jesus is the Messiah, just not the messiah for whom the Jews had been praying, and expecting. With the story of Moses and with the Exodus running in the background of this narrative, we are meant to understand this crowd of people coming to Jesus as being a group who were searching for “food”. This is not just physical food but the food they need to live as God’s children in a difficult world. Here we can see one thing John has in mind when he tells his readers this all took place *near the time of the Passover*. That feast was a celebration of the liberation of the people from their slavery in Egypt, the perfect setting for what Jesus is about to do. In Christ, all who believe are empowered to *pass-over* from a life of sin and darkness into a life of light and freedom. This is the powerful faith offering from John today.

Sometimes the demands of faith seem impossible to achieve

This call to “feed the hungry” was something the disciples themselves could not yet comprehend and understand. The only thing they can see is the impossibility of them feeding so many people with such a paucity of resources. What they could not yet appreciate was what it meant to have the Son of God sitting down there in their midst. With God *all things are possible*, but these disciples had allowed themselves to be corralled by their human limitations. They think all Jesus is doing is setting down an ideal, a vision no one is really expected to achieve. It remains, like all of the Gospel demands, something to which we aspire. But they are wrong.

Christian discipleship is about “doing” as much as “believing”

The discussion between Jesus and these disciples takes up the bulk of today’s narrative suggesting that for the evangelist the question of *faith* sits at the heart of what he intends. This helps explain why Jesus is located at the centre of proceedings with the disciples doing nothing more than seating the people and gathering the scraps. This narrative is all about Jesus; about who he is and what he is doing. The role of the disciples is deliberately kept to a secondary level.

Throughout all of this the faith of the people does not seem to have moved very far. They had come to Jesus on the basis of what they had heard he had done in other places and what he was now doing for them here on the mountain. After experiencing the miracle, the people wanted to make him their *king and a prophet*. They could accept him as the Messiah- only as long as he entertained them and met their physical needs by means of wonderful signs. For John, however, (and for the Jesus we know from all four Gospels) this kind of faith would not last and would not sustain people in the ups and down of their lives. Jesus was not “their messiah”, he was God’s Messiah, The Messiah sent into the world to lead people to life. We cannot fashion him into a Messiah we want, the Messiah we feel we need. We need to be nudged by God to be open to the myriad ways God is bringing salvation and life, not just to ourselves, but to the whole hungry world to which we have been sent as missionaries.

John’s conclusion is clear: because he was God’s Messiah, those searching for this divine life needed to obey God, to come to the Father by hearing and obeying the Son of God. This is in fact the key to the whole of this Gospel – *Jesus must be at the centre of our lives, enriching, “feeding” and guiding us* so that the abundant blessings of God may flow to us and through us flow out to others throughout the world. Through this relationship with Jesus, all we do in life is enriched and transformed – by God, in and through the Jesus within us. This is the Jesus we bring alive for people as we engage with them and feed them in their many modern hungers.

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