



August 2<sup>nd</sup>

## **THE NEW SHOFAR**

**The ways of God are not our ways**

**Do not limit God to our human imagination.**

**everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; come, buy and eat! Come...**

In this magnificent text from Isaiah – and there are many – we have a fundamental biblical Truth about God. What God wants most of all is for us to come to Him. This is what God does. It is who God is. God is a God of invitation. In our present text Yahweh is inviting people who have undergone massive suffering and sense of loss. They look around them in the hope of finding a way forward in life. At least a way home from exile and into a land of milk and honey. They see nothing and yet they keep on persevering. Why? Because even in the darkness and the dust of misery they can hear this life-giving voice of the Almighty – come to me.

***Nothing can deprive us of the love God pours out on us***

Here too in our reading from Romans is another powerful biblical message. While we might wonder at times about the specifics of this work out for us, we are told we could march into the very depth of hell and know we will survive! Look at that list of things most people would presume have absolute power over us - ***I know this. None of these things: Death, life, angels, rulers, things happening now, things that will happen in the future, high things, low things; nothing else in all the world can come between us and God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord.*** There is no guesswork here on the part of Paul. It is something he knows with the most absolute of certainties. It is from his experience.

***'Bring them here to me.'***

We now find Matthew picking up and further highlighting the same biblical message. This flows naturally from the experience of believers: God is present within us and around us even when we battle on unaware of that presence. The difficulty we have is to discern that presence. The great mystic John of the Cross wrote that we are fired into this life with a “madness” that comes from God, which is a part of our very being. That leave us *incurably restless, seeking, longing, and insatiably drawn to beauty, goodness, truth and unity beyond ourselves.* This, he says, is our desire for God. It is innate. It is who we are and nothing the world can offer can satisfy those desires.

In the language of faith, the ultimate object of all of this is God. We long for a complete and ecstatic union with God; with others and with the world. This is a biblical truth. This too is at the heart of today’s Gospel. The disciples are unable to feed the crowd. As Jewish men of that time, they were limited, unable to overcome the hunger.

But they are not left powerless in feeding the world. They understand it is their calling, their reason for following Jesus but they remain unable to see what that faith should be opening for them. The Messiah is right there. He is in their midst. They have a head-knowledge of what Jesus can do and what God wants Jesus to be doing among them. And yet they fail to act on what they know. Theirs is a faith crisis.

### ***We need to understand the Holiness of the God who calls us***

There is a difference between seeing Jesus as a great bloke, a representative of a wonderful idea, someone worth following, and seeing Jesus as the Son of God. The apostles did not understand the divinity of Jesus. If they had faith, they would have gone to Him and asked: *Will you feed these hungry people please!*

The underlying problem is how Jesus had become too familiar. He was their Messiah. Jesus was the Messiah they wanted and felt they needed. What they could not see was Jesus in the eyes of the Father who had sent Him.

God is Holy. This is proclaimed over and over again across the whole of the Bible. It means He is “Other”. He is incomprehensible; beyond our conception; even beyond imagination, awesome, awe-full. The infinite is not like the finite, much as we would like to turn God into a being in our own image and likeness. This means our first disastrous response to “hungers” is not a turn to God. It is about sorting it out first.

### ***God is a God of surprise***

The great thing about this biblical Truth is how it requires of us to allow God to be God. He will always surprise us because He has perspectives beyond ours and so God is always more than we could ever anticipate or even imagine.

We should not try and capture God. We need to learn to live in wonder rather than strive to do the impossible – understand the infinite in the language and images of the finite. This is exactly what the Apostles did and it is why the people remained hungry – no matter how good their intentions were.

Is this not a significant problem for all believers? We try to confine God by approaching Him in the categories of human understanding rather than through the categories of faith. We nudge God into meeting our expectations. The more we fail to appreciate the Holiness of God the more God is likely to die in our lives.

What we are called to be doing is backing off a little and giving God the space in which to be God. That is what He wants but we hinder that divine saving love. We do that by acting as though God feels, acts, and thinks as we do. We break down our life with God when we slim God down to fit the size, expectations, and reasoning of our human mind and imagination.

We simply cannot *conceive of a* God who is the God revealed to us in the Bible. Our language cannot express His immensity. And that is great because it means we need simply to pursue God and allow God to be God in the only way God can be God.