

Matt 14:13-21

I wonder...

I wonder...

I wonder why, when you have to walk across a railway line, there is a sign up which reads, "Stop. Look. Listen." Why?

I wonder why electrical items have stickers on telling you not to take them into the bathroom?

I wonder why Snicker bars tell you they contain nuts?

I wonder why Matthew, and Mark, and Luke, and John all decided (when they were writing their books about Jesus, some of which only stretch to twenty pages long), I wonder why (as they wrote about the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus), why they all chose to include the story about Jesus and the picnic?

Now, don't get me wrong, I love a good picnic. What do you need for a good picnic?

A blanket

A picnic basket

Sandwiches

Crisps

Pastie

Scotch egg

Pop

Flask of tea

Cake

Biscuits

Well, Jesus' picnic had none of those things – none, in fact when they asked around all they could rustle up was five loaves of bread and two fish – not even any mayo! This picnic is not looking good and it only gets worse.

You see, when you do a head count of all the people who had followed Jesus out into the countryside to hear him teaching about God, you find out that there are a total of 5000 people! Well, actually, Mark tells us in his account that it's 5000 men, so imagine doubling it with women and then maybe double that number again with children – so, about 20,000 people!

The disciples had wanted to send the people to the local villages to get food, but Jesus insisted that the disciples feed everyone. It's an impossible task, they ask around and all they can rustle up are the five loaves and two fish.

That means everyone will get  $1/4000^{\text{th}}$  of a loaf of bread and  $1/10,000^{\text{th}}$  of a fish, that's about a crumb and a flake!

So, do you know what some people have said? They have said that when the crowds following Jesus had finished listening to him speak, they just waited to see what was going to happen next. Then when Jesus told the disciples to feed the crowd and all they could find was a boy with a few loaves and fish everyone else suddenly got out their packed lunch and said, "Oh, we ought to share what we've got too" and that's how everyone was able to eat.

But hang on, remember Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are writing their Gospels, as short as twenty pages long. If that was you, would you include the story of the unmiraculous shared picnic- lunch? A story which the other three writers have put in their accounts anyway? Of course you wouldn't. If its that banal, it doesn't make sense to include it.

Of all the things which could be said on a notice, sticker, or wrapper, the reason why there is a notice up by railway lines telling you to "Stop. Look. Listen." is because it is important to do just that.

The reason electrical goods carry warnings about staying away from water is because it is important you don't mix electricity and water. The reason food packaging contains warnings about nuts is because it is important to avoid that food if you have a nut allergy.

If you haven't got much space, you only include the important information.

And none of the Gospel writers included information in their accounts of Jesus unless it was important, remember John actually makes the point that Jesus did lots of miracles, but he hasn't included all of them, just the important ones which will bring someone to faith.

(John 20:30-31 "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.")

So what actually happened at this picnic, why was it so important that it had to be included in the Gospels over and above many other things which Jesus did?

Well, imagine you were sat at your picnic in the park and suddenly a car rolls up, but I mean a posh car, a really posh car, a super-doooper Rolls Royce followed by a black Range Rover with Police motorcycle outriders surrounding both of them. The door opens and an elderly lady wearing a crown gets out and very politely asks whether or not she can join you for a sandwich and a cup of tea.

Even if you have never seen her before all the signs point to one thing – she's the Queen – at your picnic!

So it was with Jesus' feeding of the 5000 – this is an enormous sign declaring who Jesus is.

When God had led his people from slavery in Egypt to freedom he had fed them in the wilderness with manna; bread from heaven and so a belief grew up that when the Messiah came he would do the same thing, so the Gospel writers are including this event in their accounts because it is an important announcement. They are saying, "Look! Here is Jesus fulfilling what the Messiah is expected to do, it's not a nice story about sharing your lunch – why would we include that? It Jesus declaring who he is!"

It's like our signs and stickers, it's there because it's important, it reinforces that Jesus is the chosen one sent by God.

But not only does it look back to the feeding of God's people in the wilderness, it also looks ahead to the great heavenly banquet when all of God's people will gather together and enjoy God's provision. Jesus spoke of it back in chapter 8 verse 11 of Matthew when he said, "I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven."

Here with so many people and no earthly way of feeding them, Jesus gives us a foretaste of what is to come in heaven. Again the Gospel writers are saying "Look at Jesus! Look at how he fulfils all that has been promised from God. Look how amazingly he is going to provide for us for all eternity."

Listen, did you about the German art gallery cleaner this week?

Bless her, the cleaner at the city's Ostwall Museum went to work on the Martin Kippenberger installation entitled "When It Starts Dripping From the Ceiling" which was on loan from a private collector and valued at 800,000 euros (\$1.1 million).

To be fair, Kippenberger had created a tower of wooden slats under which a rubber trough was placed with a thin beige layer of paint representing dried rain water, so, taking it for an actual stain, the cleaner scrubbed the surface until it gleamed.

How easy it can be to mistake a valuable work of art for an everyday occurrence and wipe away its meaning.

And when we read the account of the feeding of the 5000+ we need to make sure that we don't do the same thing and treat the miraculous and important indicator of who Jesus is and what he will do for a simple picnic in the wilderness.

Perhaps its good to ask ourselves; have we scrubbed away the true identity of Jesus in our lives? Have we turned him into something safe, something bland, something quaint but sterile, or are we allowing the full glorious majesty of Jesus to burst out of our Bibles and into our lives? If we do the latter, then like the disciples back then, our lives will never be the same again, they will be filled with the wonder of the Messiah.