



April 2015

Empty and full

(Luke 9:1-17)

I never noticed before last week that in Luke's Gospel the feeding of the 5000 takes place immediately after the Sending Out of the 12.

In the account of the feeding of the 5000, the disciples turn to Jesus: "Send the crowd away so they can go to the surrounding villages ... and find food..." (v 12) In other words: "We have nothing to give them – our hands are empty."

Ok, so they had a few scraps of bread and fish, but that was nowhere near enough: be realistic, Jesus!

But Jesus had just commissioned them to go out in pairs and "preach the kingdom of God", giving them "power and authority" (v 1) Not just a bit of paper confirming that they had Level 1 Preaching Skills and an A/S level demon casting. Jesus had given them his own power and authority, the same power that raised him from the dead. The authority that was his by right, as the Word of the Father and Lord of all. Their hands were most definitely full, full to overflowing with the power that created the universe and cast stars into space.

How quickly the disciples began to doubt; how quickly they felt that their hands were empty, that they were inadequate for the task; that Jesus had failed to equip them properly. They began to panic and look only in human terms at the problem.

In human terms it was a big one; the people had formed a huge crowd and seemed intent on staying for as long as Jesus could speak.

The disciples felt responsible for them; they felt uncomfortable at being faced by needs that were overwhelming; perhaps even resentful at needs they could not meet.

But Jesus reminds them that their hands are in fact full, despite what it looks like with their human eyes. "You give them something to eat," he says, smiling and waiting for the cogs to whirr, for the penny to drop, for the lessons of all that time on the road (casting out demons, preaching and healing) to help them approach the next problem in Jesus' strength as well.

In the end he has to give them a bit more of a shove, telling them what to do so the extent of his authority and power in them can be seen in the feeding of those hungry people in that impossible way. And I think it's good that they struggled: the disciples are recognising that in their own strength they have nothing to give, even after those heady days of ministry. But in Christ they rediscover that they have everything. (v 15-17)

And you: do your hands feel full or empty? Do you feel that Jesus has given you enough power to do the things he has called you to do? Do you think he would send you out on a mission without equipping you for it? We too have been given all power and authority, to minister love, be a mouthpiece for truth and justice, to model Godly character, to be messengers for the Gospel, to make good work, and to mould culture for God's glory.

We know that in our own strength, our hands are empty, so that's a good place to start. Emptiness - being "poor in spirit" - drives us to our knees where we say, "Help, Lord!" But because of Jesus, we have everything we need to make new disciples. When, on our knees and desperate, we look again at our hands, we discover that we have everything we need.



Go and make disciples... and he will be with us always. And come back to tell us how you got on! (v 10)

Think Smaller Prayer Challenge Update:

On the same theme, have you remembered to keep up the challenge to pray for a family of non- church folk with children every week in 2015? Remember that the church exists to reach such as these, more than for you and me who are already saved.

There are prayer cards available to help you know what to pray, and to serve as a reminder to keep your chosen family in mind. We want you to pray God's blessing on every area of their lives, their work, their leisure time, their relationships. And of course that they may know God's love for them and respond to him. Who knows where this prayer challenge might lead them, and what results it might have for you.

It's not too late to send them an invitation to the Alpha course although the introductory meal will have taken pace already. Or perhaps you can bless them in some small practical way. Or perhaps God is calling you to be faithful in prayer even when there is no sign of green shoots and you don't know them well enough to have further contact.

Please feed back to me any comments on how you are finding this prayer adventure. There might be very small signs of encouragement but small beginnings can lead to powerful things.

Book review

Life Without Limits: inspiration for a ridiculously good life Nick Vujicic

This book is the autobiography of Nick Vujicic who was born in 1982, in Melbourne Australia, without arms or legs for which there was no medical explanation. His early life was marred by confusion, loneliness and depression until he found a deep personal faith in God who rescued him and gave him purpose in living. Nick then determined to overcome profound disabilities and seemingly impossible odds and, as a result, he has been used by God in an incredible way to affect the lives of thousands of people who struggle with self image or the 'I'll never be good enough' attitude.

Life without Limits suggests and describes exactly that! It is full of stories of relentless perseverance many of them told in a self effacing humorous way as Nick shares his journey towards an independent, fulfilled and 'ridiculously good' life. He has become an evangelist and internationally known motivational speaker and his writing is littered with challenges to the reader to live the best life possible using to the full the gifts and talents God has given us. God doesn't make mistakes with His creation. As Nick writes, "My imagination flows through God's eyes. I trust Him. I have full assurance in my heart that even without arms and legs, I can build a wonderful life"

For me, this has not been a 'I couldn't put it down' book but one which I have been reading over a period of time and find inspiring every time I absorb a few chapters. At the back of the copy that I have, there is a personal action plan guide covering each chapter so that the challenges and teaching can be applied individually or even perhaps as



a group study. I would also encourage anyone who finds this interesting to go onto the website www.lifewithoutlimbs.org where there are some amazing films and stories about Nick's life and especially, since writing this book, his marriage and experience of becoming a father. I hope this inspires you as it has me.

Lizzy Kitchen

Published by WaterBrook Press

We have many amazing books in the church library, and some of you are avid readers. It would be great to share what we learn and encourage others to try books that we have found helpful.

Could you write a book review? Attached is a form to help if you're not sure how to go about it. We would like to put them on the web site, and have paper copies near the book shelves. CD / DVD reviews would be great too. Have you watched a DVD that raised interesting thoughts about life?

Whole Life Resources

Have you visited the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity website yet?

"LICC exists to envision and equip Christians and their churches for whole-life missionary discipleship in the world. We seek to serve them with biblical frameworks, practical resources, training and models so that they flourish as followers of Jesus and grow as whole-life discipling communities."

www.licc.org.uk

Their understanding of how we can reach our part of the UK makes great sense, and the site

offers many ideas about how to see your whole life as your mission to serve God wherever you are. You'll recognise many of the resources and the diagrams from services and communications at Christ Church.

You can sign up for weekly emails with thoughts and resources. You can read their online magazine E.g. or get it mailed to you.

"Who can tell how God is working today among the people we will meet tomorrow? Who can tell how he has been working in us tonight preparing us for the people and the situations we may meet tomorrow?" - *Mark Greene in "Alert to God, Fit for Purpose" E.g. No. 39 Mar 2015*

To read the whole article and the rest of the magazine, follow this link:

<http://www.licc.org.uk/resources/2015/03/31/eg-39/>

Diary Dates

Alpha is back

If you or someone you know would like to find out more about the Christian faith or find out how to feel more confident in your relationship with Jesus, it's not too late to sign

up. The course will begin on Monday 11th May. For more information email alpha@christchurchdownend.com or speak to Paul, Jane Harding or Jane White.

Women's Events:

Light Lunch Mon 29th June – Mayann has kindly offered to open her home for lunch and hopes that women of all ages will enjoy meeting each other. From 12 pm

Cycle ride and Pub supper Wed 17 June



- *We have just heard that the relevant bit of cycle path will be closed during that time so more details to follow.*

Fundraising Dinner for Tanzania Sat 27th June

Men's Events

Bizarre Bath Comedy Walk Huntsman Inn,
North Parade passage, Bath 1945 for
2000. £8pp Wed 20th May

C in the Park Sun 21st June, help anytime
from 0600, King George V Playing Fields

Questions? Feedback? Ideas to share? Please
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Anita