



SERMON ON THE 18TH SUNDAY OF YEARLY CYCLE A: MATTHEW 14:13-21, 3 AUGUST 2008

Pastor Eva Hadem

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the Communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Five loaves of bread, two fishes – no:

Plums, melons, bananas, apples, biscuits.

Breakfast, a three-course midday meal, coffee and cakes, an evening meal warm or cold of with a buffet. Crisps, peanuts, chocolate and licorice into the middle of the night. House Ohrbeck is a Shangri-La – where eating knows no end.

This morning here at our Christian service we are on a building site. Unhoused, provisional. Religious history can be seen: a little patch of ceiling decoration from the 1920s, stained glass windows from the postwar period – what prayers may once have resonated into these walls ... An unfinished process of upheaval in the middle of Shangri-La.

Dear Bibleweek Community:

“eating in a provisional way” – the Gospel for this Sunday can be touched here on the building site – we just heard it, in its briefest version according to Matthew. It limits itself to the essentials:

Jesus and the Disciples wanted to be alone, but the people would not let them go. They could not be shaken off and came running after them. And Jesus turns to them, forgetting all desire for solitude, and sees that some are suffering, heals them – and then it’s evening. Nobody bothered to think about the catering. No Chantal Hohenstein, going through the crowd with her team and, thanks to long-range planning, distributing plums, melons, bananas, apples, biscuits, any amount of finger-food, served with wine and napkins.

Nothing of the sort. Five loaves, two fishes. That’s everything the Disciples were able to rustle up. And they weren’t expecting a miracle: “Let the people go and look after their food themselves”.

But Jesus wants community, and if the people have spent the day together, they cannot eat alone in the evening – at the Bible Week we’ve been experiencing for 40 years that the important things happen in-between, at mealtimes, in the coffee breaks. And so the people all sit down on the grass, five loaves, two fishes, a blessing, distribute it all – and that’s it. And it works: 5,000 men and numerous women and children all get enough to eat. And plenty is left over: 12 full baskets!

In order to explain this miracle, Christians among themselves relate a simple solution which makes perfect sense to me: all the people had brought along something to eat in their pockets. The sort of thing you have with you when you are journeying during the day: plums, melons, bananas, apples, biscuits. Flatbreads and a few olives, dried meat. And when everyone brings something, there is always more than enough. Every potluck meal proves that.

Five loaves and two fishes. Those are the visible provisions – everything else is provided by the community. This is the wealth which is present where people meet, communicate, share life for a while.

Not on the grass, but nevertheless, we are sitting here somewhat unhoused in a building site. Not 5,000 but around 100 all the same.

And together we have looked back at 40 years of International Jewish-Christian Bible Week during this past week: five loaves, two fishes – what seven elements add up to the key components of the Bible Week success story?

The first place has to be occupied by the text itself which we study and discuss ... though the rest of this list of hits will vary from person to person.

What is it that everyone adds so that we all end up having enough and 12 baskets are left over? Speakers' Corner and the Fringe are classic places where our programme expands in miraculous ways from year to year. The Bible Week only functions if you search through your pockets: What's in them that can help this community to eat its fill and grow: children and adults, Jews and Christians, people from various countries and from various backgrounds in both religions – what is it that makes the Bible Week radiate through you, shining outwards, out into the world?

But also the spirit of the times, the *Zeitgeist*, transforms and enriches the Bible Week:

After Professor Zenger's lecture, the first, Howard Cooper shared an important observation with us: though it has maintained a fairly fixed structure, the Bible Week has changed over these 40 years. In 2008 it's possible to talk about the Book of Leviticus, but in 1970 things looked different. And how heatedly and passionately we discussed the state of dialogue in those final Bendorf years. In particular the younger ones among us demanded: the time is ripe for a dialogue of equals. No more sitting at the feet of a teacher, an equally balanced exchange, real sharing, all asymmetry banished ... With flushed faces we sat in the old "Haupthaus" and the discussions finally ended with wine. Whether or not we have made advances in 2008 with our new Group II with its theme of "Jewish-Christian Bible Study" remains to be seen – from the evaluation forms.

Times for prayer and meditation and the religious services at the end of the week – praising God is an important part of the Bible Week. And nevertheless, or perhaps because of this, some lively disagreements unfolded over the 40 years in the preparation meetings for the services. And at the end of the day this dimension of alongside-each-other can be painful – that includes the inner-Christian divisions as well as those between Jews and Christians. The Bible Week is, and will remain, a building site. An attempt made in the here and now. And always a painful one.

The 12 baskets full of leftovers were also understood in a Messianic sense by the commentators. They were supposed to symbolise the reconstituted 12 Tribes of Israel at the end of time. The promised future when the Messiah comes (back) is depicted by many images in both First and Second Testament. And I love all of them!

And today I want to imagine this promise along the lines of the Shangri-La known as Haus Ohrbeck: plums, melons, bananas, apples, biscuits – the abundance of delicious things has no end and the fact of being together knows no limits and no pain any longer.

And then, but only then, the Bible Week will no longer be a building site.

This chapel will re-appear in its new guise, simple and radiant, at our next Bible Week.

And we are full now of that radiance of the Bible Week: the spirit of dialogue and this special experience of being together. Let us continue to build in the year ahead, taking the spirit of dialogue out into the world: plums, melons, apples, biscuits ...

We will meet again here in the Shangri-La of Haus Ohrbeck.

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard our hearts and our senses. Amen.