

Picnic memories



Gillian Cooper *reflects on* John 6:1-21

Picnics for me are bound up with memories of seaside holidays. Picnics must have egg sandwiches and crisps, something cold and fizzy to drink, chocolate biscuits that have melted a little, perhaps a banana. And of course there must be just a little bit of sand on everything. Bread and sardines would definitely not be on my list of favourites.

But today's Gospel reading is not about a picnic. The account is shot through with theology. It is near the Passover festival, so our thoughts turn to the meal which re-enacts God's salvation of the people from slavery. The people are hungry near a mountain, reminding us of God's miraculous provision of manna on Israel's wilderness journey to Mount Sinai. This is not about a picnic, it is about who Jesus really is. Only God can make food. Only God can walk on the stormy water of a lake. Jesus is recognised as "the prophet who is to come into the world" but he is more than a prophet. In him are seen the signs of God's presence.

We come to God's table and are given bread. It is the bread of our Passover, our story of salvation when slavery and death give way to freedom and life. It is the bread of the desert, the miraculous food that turns our wilderness into a place of life and hope. 🍞

Feed us, Lord, at your table. Give us the bread of salvation to free us from our sin, and manna to sustain us on our journey, that we may travel in faith to our home in your kingdom. Amen.

Lesser-known characters of the Bible

Onesimus

by Caroline Fletcher

Onesimus' plight is described in Paul's Letter to Philemon. Most think that Onesimus was a slave who had fled from Philemon, his master. Onesimus went on to meet the imprisoned Paul and became a Christian as a result. Despite Paul's deep love for the slave, he asked him to return to his master. He wrote to Philemon to ensure Onesimus

was treated well upon his return and not punished, as runaway slaves often were. Paul appealed to Philemon to view Onesimus not as a slave but as a beloved brother in Christ.

Unfortunately, in more recent times, slave traders used this letter to justify slavery, arguing that Paul must have agreed with it to send Onesimus back to his master. Yet this is to overlook how radical Paul was in an age where slavery was universally accepted: calling Christians to treat slaves as beloved brothers was the foundation of equality. 🍞

Journalling *The heart of the day*

by Julia McGuinness

A diary can be seen as a daily factual record of activities. A journal's content is simply whatever is most important to us. Rather than record everything, a journal gives us permission to write down that most meaningful something. This can be a form of *examen* – the prayer of reflecting and reviewing our day in God's presence before sleep.

Sit quietly and ask the Lord to shine a light on the standout moment of your day. What has been the day's heart for you? Your day's strongest feeling is likely to be where the action is. It might not be anything you planned, or it might be something that seemed incidental at the time – a small event, a discovery, disappointment, unexpected encounter. Write about what it has stirred and explore why it has stayed with you. What story underlies the feeling? Write around it and conclude with whatever prayer arises out of this. Write spontaneously, without self-judgement as you let go your day to God. 🍞

“Christ will always accept the faith the puts its trust in Him.”

Andrew Murray (1828-1917), South African writer, teacher and pastor