

On the wine

A Longer Read: Bishop's Breakfast

Bishop Karen hosts occasional breakfast meetings bringing together clergy, laity and representatives from the wider community to discuss matters of common concern and where there is an opportunity to create a common purpose. Instead of meeting face to face, the Bishop sent a Dorset Tea bag by post and the meeting took place online. The Revd Lydia Cook writes:

This week's breakfast (a virtual affair, using a tea bag rather than a cooked meal!) brought together speakers from the farming and producing world. They spoke compellingly and compassionately about the issues facing the farming industry and the world of food production.

What struck me were the parallels to what the church is experiencing.

Over time the amount of money people spend on food has decreased quite sharply. Thirty years ago an average household spent 35% of their income on food. That figure is now around 8%. There has crept into our culture an expectation of cheap food. Food by and large is seen as a cheap fuel rather than something of high quality input.

There are 3 things that should give us pause for thought here as Christians.

Firstly what percentage of our time and energy are we willing to invest in spiritual food? Do we expect cheap food, ie food that does require much investment from us? If we give 2 hours a week to matters of faith, assuming that we have 12 hours a day to be active in rather than asleep, that represents an investment of just over 2% of our time. What sort of nourishment do we expect for that level of investment?

Secondly, in terms of mission and evangelism, do we offer people cheap mass produced food or do we offer a more complex and more "expensive" diet? Do we give people cheese strings or a local artisan produced cheddar? What is the quality of the food we are offering? Is it of the very best we can achieve with the resources we have, or have we settled for something that doesn't tax us too much?

And thirdly, we know that many people, even with food being cheap, struggle to feed their families. We have a division in our society based on the food people can afford. The richer you are the more you can access "better" food. There is a real danger then that we exclude the voice of the poor from our church worship and our spiritual lives if it requires a wealthy background to access it.

When Jesus fed the 5000, he did so using a very small offering of 5 loaves and 2 fish. With that he didn't just give the crowd a morsel of food, survival rations, just enough to see them through, he gave them a banquet such that everyone was stuffed and there were baskets and baskets of food left over.

Even if we think we haven't got much to offer, if we give everything we have, then Jesus can perform a miracle with it. If we give ourselves wholeheartedly to our faith, then Jesus will perform a miracle. The hungry will be fed with richly satisfying food.

To get to 8% of our time we would need to invest 1 hour a day in our faith.

Is 3 chunks of 20 minutes too much to ask?

I hope not, and if we could achieve it, we would be much better placed to feed our spiritually starving nation.