

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

What are you scared of?

The things we are most scared of are, inevitably, things we don't understand, the inexplicable or the strange or the downright weird.

Fear of something strange is at the heart of our Gospel lesson this morning. It is one of the more relatable moments that the disciples have in the New Testament: if you were on a boat out on a lake and saw someone walking towards you over the water, your response would be to be terrified as well.

It isn't only the miraculous in itself which is strange in our faith, but what it tells us about ourselves. If you want simple, reasonable explanations- because it is an awkward truth that the simplistic and the rationalistic are often one and the same- then Christianity will be scary.

It is because it reflects the difficult and the scary that many of the things we do look odd or strange or weird to the outside world. There are parts of the faith that I find strange. There will be parts of the faith that you find strange. What are they? Think now. Lots of things about Christianity are weird. Good! We live in an age crying out for authenticity, and if what is authentic is what is odd then all the better.

Yet what is actually strangest about the church and about our faith is not the metaphysics of miracles at all. What is strangest and most fearful for some about Christianity is love. Being rooted and grounded in love is an odd thing, not just in this day and age but for fallen, sinful, fallible human beings more generally. Church is weird because love is weird. Think, how does love make you feel? I suspect it is as likely to make you feel strange as it does comforted.

What should our response to love be? Well, there is a very easy place to start. Come here, come to this place. And here give thanks for it. For him. Glorify him through and in the Church. Our common life together. Come to this church with a small c and enter into the life of the Church capital C. Enter into the life of love. That weird thing that we do but do because it has a depth and beauty of meaning.

In the Gospel, before the fear of Jesus crossing the sea there is another act of strange and odd power. Jesus feeds the 5000. Now as we said earlier, the facts of the miracle itself might seem odd or strange to our excessively rationalistic instincts but what actually reflects the true strangeness, the true beauty of the faith, the authentic grace of Christianity is what comes next. Jesus instructs the disciples to gather the fragments, the odds and ends, the broken parts that are left behind.

Fragments gathered together. That is what we are, what the Church is. Yet without any one of those fragments the whole is less, just like without any one of you we as a Church are less. Less representative of the whole and lessened in our communion with Christ.

The thing about the feeding of the five thousand is that by sharing they end up with more than they started with. That is true of the church. Our job is to share and therefore end up with more than we started. Share the life of our church, share the life of grace, the life of love. There is a final

strangeness about all this- that the reaction required from us is that we come here to church, but the role of the church is that we then go out and multiply that love more and more.

So, come here, bring people with you, show them love and show them God. And when you have been here go out, share, give. And whatever you do, don't be afraid.

In the name of the father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.