

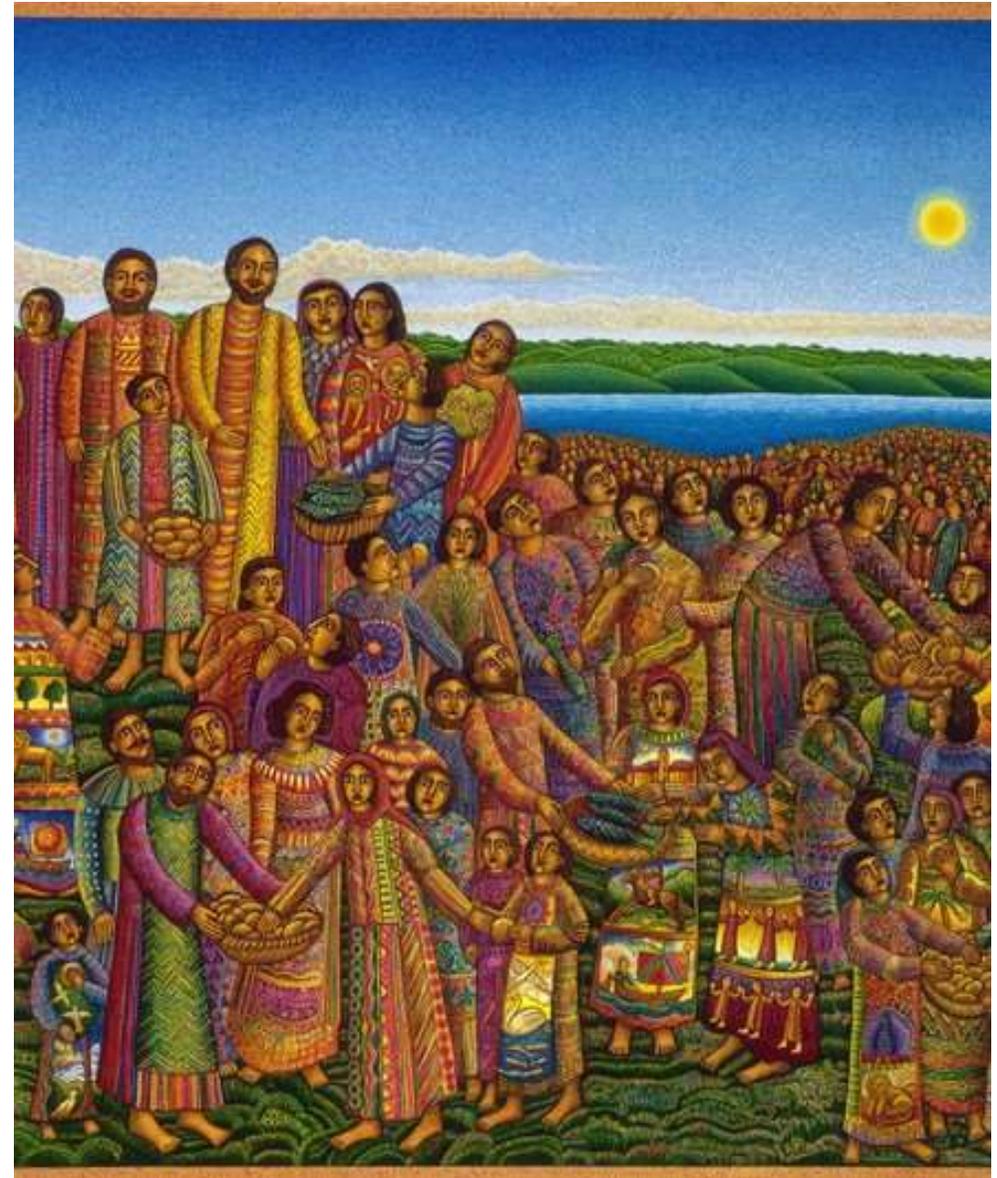
## Preparation:

The readings set for this Sunday include:

- **Genesis 32:22-31**
- **Psalms 17:1-7, 15**
- **Romans 9:1-5**
- **Matthew 14:13-21**

1. You may want to read some or all of these readings before starting your worship – or include them after the first prayer.
2. When preparing for this worship, find a place and time where you can be quiet and comfortable for half an hour.
3. Put something that speaks to you of God’s faithful love in a place where you can focus on it.
4. You can sing the hymns if you are able, or you can read the words out loud – or silently if that seems better. Alternatively you may find them on the internet
5. When you are ready, light a candle/tea light if it helps you to focus. Perhaps use the words of Psalm 17:7a: “Wondrously show me your steadfast love.”
6. Now, sit down and relax...
7. Welcome to worship!

## Order for worship on Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2020



Swanson, John August. Detail from *Loaves and Fishes*, from *Art in the Christian Tradition*, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <http://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-image/act-image-link.pl?RC=56553> [retrieved July 31, 2020]. Original source: [www.JohnAugustSwanson.com](http://www.JohnAugustSwanson.com) - copyright 2003 by John August Swanson.

## **Worship for Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> August – at Central Hall**

*Notes for worship preparation are on the other side of this sheet.*

**Call to worship:** “As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake I shall be satisfied, beholding your likeness” (Ps 17:15)

**Hymn 134:** Christ whose glory fills the skies

**Prayer:** Loving and living God, we pray that we may see your kingdom in our midst. Break into our lives with the bread of life. Show us how to pray as you prayed in the wilderness so that we too may show signs of your kingdom, through our prayers and by our lives. Forgive us Lord, the times we have neglected to pray for your blessing. Bless us now as we come to you in worship.

**Reading:** After hearing this news (that his cousin, John the Baptist, had been murdered) Jesus went alone to a quiet place to pray. *Matthew 14:13*

### **Reflection:**

How shocking for Jesus to hear that his cousin, John the Baptist, had been killed by Herod (Matt 14:1-12). Matthew points the finger at Herodias, and her daughter, but the truth is, that the decision to kill John the Baptist was that of Herod. Herod wasn't willing to suffer the loss of face when he was asked to kill John having promised up to half his kingdom. What terrible things people do to avoid a loss of face. In this case the life of a person – of a powerful prophet – is shown, in Herod's mind, to be less important than the word of a king. How Herod twisted his logic because of how he wanted to be seen by others.

Prior to this Jesus was teaching and using parables about the kingdom of heaven, but when he hears this news and goes into the wilderness, alone.

There, I imagine, he struggles with his father, not for the first time, and not for the last. He has gone through the temptations and he will yet go to Gethsemane, but at this point he is struggling with the grief and the sorrow of the murder of his cousin at the hands of those in his society who are powerful and presumably are telling themselves that they are justified in their actions.

The story is not a million miles away from the abuses of a state towards any person who is seen as weak and vulnerable. The prophet Martin Luther King was assassinated, and other prophets have been killed throughout the ages (Jesus talks about this – e.g. in Mt 23:29-37). When a person's life is seen as less valuable than one's own life, the justification begins. But there is no justification for Herod's killing of John, he abused the power invested in him. Whenever

power is misused, its justification needs to be challenged. The same thing happens in so many ways for so many people that it almost seems normal. It is part of the story behind the death of George Floyd and many, many others whose names we do not know.

The murder of John the Baptist is followed by Jesus, the Christ's murder. It turns out that no one is immune to the abuse of power. Again, justifications were made, as the powerful killed Jesus. Jesus the lamb: innocent of evil.

In the context of John's death, Jesus goes away to grieve, to speak with his Father and to find strength for the days ahead. When he returns from struggling in his grief as he prayed to his Father, he is able to do something never before heard of, except perhaps in the story of exodus, when manna fell from heaven. He feeds the people of Israel (Exodus 16:14-15).

Jesus takes a small amount of food, he breaks it and feeds 5000 men and their families. After his trauma and prayers, Jesus emerges able to reveal the kingdom of heaven. He was talking about it in the previous chapter, now he does more than tell a story about yeast or salt or light. Now he reveals the yeast, the dough, in the midst of a hungry crowd. Jesus becomes the parable about the kingdom of heaven himself. He reveals the kingdom to the crowd. The kingdom is suddenly physically present in the lives of hungry people. The psalmist asks God “wondrously show me your steadfast love.” Jesus shows us that love and reveals it in a crowd of hungry people who are hungry, like Jacob, for God's blessing.

**Hymn 465:** Guide me O thou great Jehovah

**Prayers:** We pray today for

- Our church the other churches in our area
- All who are struggling with their faith.
- All who are persecuted for their faith
- All who are faithfully loving those around them through their work

Especially today, we pray for carers and nurses who go every day into difficult situations to bring succour and healing to those in need. (Silence for your prayers) Say the **Lord's Prayer** in the language most familiar to you.

**Hymn 67:** This, this is the God we adore

### **Blessing:**

Bless us Christ with the blessings of your kingdom. Guard and guide us this day and may the blessing of God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer be with us and those we love, evermore, **Amen**