

# St Mary and St Peter's Church, Sunderland

Pontus Bramberg

Fourth Sunday in Lent (Laetare), AD 2023

'Rejoice, O Jerusalem, and come together, all ye that love her; rejoice for joy, all ye that have mourned: that ye may be glad, and be satisfied with the breasts of your consolation. I was glad when they said unto me: We will go into the house of the Lord.'

These are the words (translated) of an old Introit (opening words of the Mass), taken from Isaiah 66:10-11 and Psalm 122:1, for the Fourth Sunday in Lent. This Sunday is also sometimes called Mothering Sunday or, traditionally, Laetare Sunday (*laetare* meaning 'rejoice' (as an imperative)). Similarly to the Third Sunday in Advent (Gaudete, also meaning 'rejoice'), this is a Sunday where some celebration and joy is allowed to enter the otherwise penitential season of Lent. This is sometimes signified by redecorating the church in rose as opposed to the violet we normally see in Lent and Advent.

The historic Gospel reading for this day (as in the Book of Common Prayer lectionary) is John 6:1-14, recounting the story of the Feeding of the 5000. This familiar story is the only miracle, apart from the Resurrection, which appears in all four gospels (Matthew 14:13-21, Mark 6:31-44, Luke 9:12-17, and John 6:1-14). For those not familiar with the story, Our Lord feeds a multitude ('about five thousand in all') with only five barley loaves and two fish; after the disciples distribute this to the seated crowd everyone is able to eat until they are satisfied and twelve baskets are filled from the fragments left over.

This Gospel passage tells us that the miracle occurred when the Passover was near as indeed Easter is near on this Sunday (21 days remaining). This is also significant as the Passover is associated not only with the Exodus but God sustaining the children of Israel in the wilderness; similarly this miracle shows that Christ, who is God, sustains his followers and we can take comfort in this truth.