

Pentecost 9A August 02 2020  
Matthew 14:13-21  
St Peter's Lutheran Church Elizabeth  
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Grace and peace to you, wonderful miracles of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

*'Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." [The disciples] replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish... And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.'* Let's pray:

*We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.* The disciples do a stocktake. They check the fridge, the freezer, the pantry and declare that there's not enough to go around. We do it all of the time don't we? Our lives are programmed to budgets, living within our means, calculating the cost. We seem to approach life by doing the maths. We count what's available, but get more distracted by what's not there. This blinds us to the possibilities of what might be. We're unable to see a way forward, unable to see Christ in our midst. We see only lack or scarcity.

As long as we approach life as a mathematical problem to be solved, there will never be enough to go around. Jesus didn't ask the disciples to do a stocktake when he said to them, "... you give them something to eat." It was a test. Would the disciples look around or would they look within? Would they see with physical eyes or with the eyes of the heart; the eyes of faith? Would they focus on what wasn't there or would they focus on Jesus?

*We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish...* and THE LORD OF ALL CREATION! Jesus ignores the maths. He disregards how many loaves of bread it will take to feed the crowd, the cost of a loaf of bread, how many fish should be ordered. And there's plenty to go around. It's a MIRACLE!

Do you believe in miracles? Did Jesus really heal the sick and raise the dead? Did he really walk on water? Did he really turn water into wine? Did he really feed 5000 men, plus women and children, with five loaves of bread and two fish? Does God perform miracles today?

There're three main views concerning the question of miracles. There're those who believe that the miracles of the Bible are true, but that they stopped occurring at the end of the "apostolic age;" when all of the original disciples had died. They believe that the miracles of the New Testament served to establish Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, and to empower and get the church started.

Another more radical view, is that the miracles of the New Testament are not to be understood as literal events. Miracles should be understood as parables about power and authority in the new Israel, that Jesus healed people metaphorically as a way of saying that the Kingdom of God stands against this worldly system of injustice.

The third, and more traditional view, is that the miracles of the Bible are miracles – divine intervention in human affairs. Those who hold this view accept the miracles of the Bible without explanation or proof and believe that miracles still happen today. For what it's worth, I hold this traditional view of miracles, so what follows is based on that assumption.

One thing about miracles is that there's no way to predict when or where they might occur. Jesus needed to get away from everything and everyone and spend time alone to mourn the loss of John the Baptist. You know what it's like when you've heard terrible news. You just want to be left alone to process what's happened and to deal with the shock. Jesus needed to spend some time out on the Sea of Galilee, thinking, praying, and shedding a tear. Yet, his compassion for the needs of the people in the crowd prompted him to come ashore and perform healing miracles. Who could've imagined he would then proceed to feed a hungry horde with a snack? Miracles occur when we least expect them.

Another thing is that there seems to be little correlation between the miracles of Jesus and the people involved in them. We might find this difficult to accept, because we like to think that Jesus heals those who are righteous or who exhibit strong faith – those who, somehow, "deserve it". We like to remember the stories where Jesus says, "Your faith has made you well; go in peace" (Luke 8:48).

However, there's often no cause-effect relationship between faith and miracles. We should be very worried if the degree of our faith or righteousness is the deciding factor in whether or not God will be merciful. And, it's offensive to think that those who are healed are more deserving than others who aren't.

I've been praying for a healing miracle for Kingsley Hage every day since I learnt of his situation. And I'm not alone. Countless others, including his family, yourselves, and many people I've never met, also pray with us, I'm sure. Yet, in spite of all the prayers, Kingsley continues to suffer terribly.

In another instant, I and others prayed for an indigenous brother one day and he was instantly healed.

Do we say that on the one hand our prayers aren't being heard, and on the other, they are? Or is God saying yes in one case and no in another? The bigger picture is that God is faithful as we heard last week, "[Nothing] in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:39); even though questions remain that we'll never be able to answer.

It's helpful to remember that healing and wholeness and salvation are closely related. To be healed is to be made whole, and to be made whole is to be saved.

The miracles of Jesus are about removing those things that are barriers between us and God: He opened the eyes of the blind in order that they might see God's glory; he unstopped the ears of the deaf in order that they might hear God's Word; he loosened the tongues of the dumb in order that they might sing God's praise; he made the lame walk in order that they might walk in newness of life; he fed the multitude in order that they might remember God's gracious providence to their ancestors and know to whom to turn for their daily bread. The nature of miracles is that they remove all those obstacles separating us from God's love in Christ Jesus.

We miss the point when we ask, "Why did Jesus heal this man or this woman and not another?" Or, "Why didn't he heal all those who were sick and raise all those who had died?" Better still, "Why didn't he put an end to disease and death, then and there?"

In his life and ministry, Jesus healed a lot of people, but he didn't heal everyone, and he didn't heal anyone, once and for all. Those he healed got sick again, and those he raised from the dead eventually died again. The purpose of healing the sick and raising the dead wasn't to suspend the laws of nature but to bear witness to the power of God over life and death. Miracles are signs of God's power bearing witness to his lordship over our lives.

What's important is not the sign but the One to whom the sign points. This is a paradox we need to keep in mind: When you look for miracles to confirm your faith, you can never get enough of them; but when you centre your mind and heart on the presence of God, he reveals signs of his power and love to you. Not only in the dramatic, unexplained happenings such as instantaneous healings, serendipitous moments, near-death experiences, and bountiful feasts; but in the commonplace, yet no-less-miraculous events of everyday life - like the dawning of a sunrise, the rebirth of creation each new day, the transformation of boys and girls, men and women into children of God, and the gift of love.

To experience the awe of God's might in the fury of a storm, his gentleness in the smile of a baby, his grace in the generosity of others, his beauty in the glow of a rainbow, his love in the death and resurrection of Jesus, is to experience a power infinitely greater than yourself and to know that your life is secure in God's hands.

I believe in miracles. I believe God can heal the sick and raise the dead; but most of all, I believe God is at work in every aspect of our lives, pouring out his love for us, revealing his majesty, and inviting us into a closer relationship with Jesus Christ. Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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## A JOKE FOR YOUR ENJOYMENT!

A young preacher graduated from Seminary and was invited back to his home congregation to preach. He wanted to make a good impression and did his best to prepare a sermon for his home church. He wrote his sermon word for word and memorised it. He had a very dramatic beginning to the sermon.

He started thumping the pulpit and said, "Jesus took 5,000 fishes and 2,000 loaves and he fed five people!" He paused very dramatically and pointed his finger at the congregation and said, "Could you do that?" Everyone roared with laughter and he couldn't imagine what was going on. At that point one man raised his hand. That set the young preacher off. He said, "Sir, you are guilty of blasphemy. How could you claim to do something that only our Lord could do?" The man stood up and explained to the young preacher about the mistake that he had made.

The preacher was so humiliated that he couldn't say another word. He sat down in utter confusion and disgrace. The home church was very loving, very kind, very forgiving and they all gathered around and put their arms around him and said, "Look, everyone makes mistakes. Forget about it. You work on this sermon and try it again next Sunday." So, he did.

The next Sunday after working on the sermon for the whole week, the young preacher stood up in front of the congregation. This time he got all of his facts and figures straight, but he started out exactly the same way. He thumped the pulpit dramatically and said, "Jesus took five loaves and two fishes and he fed 5,000 people. Could you do that?" The same man raised his hand. The preacher was really upset and he said, "Sir, how can you claim to do something like that?" The man said, "With the leftovers from your sermon last Sunday."