

## ***Miracle Moment***

Text: Matthew 14:13-21

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August 2, 2020

Maybe it is the size of the crowd on hand to see; maybe it was the “wow” factor, maybe it was the importance of the event for the ministry of Jesus. Whatever it was, none of the Gospel writers missed it! This is the only miracle story included in all four Gospels, which makes it clear that this story was of great importance to the early church. The way in which Jesus is described as blessing the bread conjures images of the Last Supper and our celebration of Holy Communion. The deserted setting might bring to mind the Israelites who were in the desert for 40 years, being sustained daily only by manna from heaven. Perhaps we may even recall Jesus’ own temptation in the wilderness, when he refused to feed himself when famished.

How did they end up in this deserted place to begin with? You may recall that the first words of today’s reading were, “when Jesus heard this.” What he had heard was that John the Baptist had been beheaded. All we know of Jesus’ reaction to this is that “he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself.” But, when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns.

The day had worn on and it was late. The twelve disciples suggested to Jesus that the people be sent away to find food. Jesus simply stated, “They need not go away; you give them something to eat.” Of course, the disciples (in protest) reply, “we have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.” The disciples are only able to see a barrier, an impossibility. I imagine that I would also respond the same way! Even when I am hosting a small number of people at my home for dinner, I find myself questioning whether or not I will have enough food! If there were a crowd as large as this, I would certainly be overwhelmed. The needs are so great, and the resources were so few. But Jesus says, “Bring them here to me.” Jesus takes the five loaves and two fish, looks up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled.

It is clear that a miracle has occurred. However, we don't really have any of the critical details about how it actually happened! When did the bread expand? How did that happen? How could there possibly be enough? How did the disciples give the food to the people? And did the fish get expanded also, or was it just the bread? Where did the twelve baskets come from? How were those baskets still full of broken pieces of bread even after everyone ate? Was it the prayer that Jesus said that made this all possible? Even in these questions, the focus is on the mechanics of the miracle.

Yet, this time when I read the passage over and over, I found myself noticing two things I had not quite noticed before. First, I noticed Jesus' compassion. Without a lot of details filled in for us, we can only surmise that Jesus wanted to be alone. After all, he went by himself in a boat to a remote location. And yet, "a great crowd" (numbering 5,000 men, besides women and children) –had shown up. I suppose this was the equivalent to first century paparazzi! Jesus certainly had gained celebrity status by this point in his ministry. However, instead of being angry or frustrated, we read that, "he (Jesus) had compassion for them." Wow. Even though Jesus was likely grieving his cousin, John's death and wanting to be alone, he still looked on the people with compassion. This is such a key reality of this gospel message! The people have need, and Jesus has compassion. Jesus cares so deeply about the most basic needs of these people, which is what drives his actions. Perhaps the moment of the miracle in this story was when Jesus had compassion on the people in the first place.

The second thing I noticed as I studied this passage: Jesus was not actually the one who fed the people in spite of the fact that most Bibles give a heading to this story that reads something like "Jesus Feeds Five Thousand." Jesus told the disciples to give the people something to eat. The disciples, in faith, hand him what little food they had, after blessing it, Jesus gives food back to the disciples, who then feed the others. Perhaps the moment of the miracle in this story occurred when the disciples agreed to partner and participate with Jesus.

It seems to me the gospel message comes through these two parts of the story. Jesus' compassion guides his action, but he does not do the work alone. When we see others with the compassion of Christ, it can guide our action. Our call is to active ministry that meets

human need! When we join together in unity and faithfulness, we are the hands and feet of Christ. God calls US to be disciples: to be the means through which God's work is done in our world today. The power of God's love is miraculous! God's intention for love, peace and justice in the world WILL ultimately prevail. Perhaps the moment of the miracle in our own story is when we realize we are God's modern-day disciples and that God is working through us to show God's compassion... and it is in that moment when God's kingdom is realized as heaven on earth.

I will end now with this parable to ponder.

In a small coffee shop between the worlds, a holy man sat having a cup of tea with the Creator. "Your Omniscience, please tell me about heaven and hell." "Oh, come with me. I'll show you." And so, the Creator took him to the back of the coffee shop where there were two identical doors. The Creator opened the first one. When the holy man looked inside, he saw a large room. At the center of the room there was a round table and in the middle of that, a huge stew pot simmering and giving off the most fragrant, delicious aroma. All around the table sat thin, gray, sickly people. Each of them had a spoon with an extremely long handle. As he watched, he saw that whilst they were able to reach the pot and get spoonful – because of the long handles - they could not get the spoon into their mouths. The holy man was overcome with pity for the plight of these people. He turned to the Creator who said, "This is hell." The Creator opened the second door. The holy man looked inside to see the same room, with the same round table, with the same stew pot. But around this table the people were robust, healthy and happy. They were laughing and sharing stories and jokes. "I don't understand!" said the holy man. The Creator replied, "Just watch." And as he did, he saw each of the people pick up their spoon, dip it into the stew pot and feed each other.

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