

I speak to you in the NAME of the FATHER, and of the SON, and of the HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN

OPENING:

A couple weeks ago in our Virtual Coffee Hour, the question asked for our discussions was: “What is your favorite of Jesus’ *parables*?”

We had just heard, that Sunday as the Gospel, the Parable of the Weeds, and so it was fun to hear what people’s favorites were:

be it the Good Samaritan/ the Prodigal Son/ the Sower, or another parable.

Well, today, we might have as our guiding question: “What is your favorite of Jesus’ *miracles*?” as we just heard, in our Gospel, the famous story of the ‘Feeding of the 5000’?

So be thinking what indeed your favorite is... Maybe it’s one of Jesus’ many healing miracles, or maybe the miracle of walking on water (which we will here next week) Perhaps it’s the raising of Lazarus, or the Resurrection itself?

All food for thought. *Food for thought.*

The Feeding of the 5000 has always been one of the Church’s favorite stories, maybe because it about Food!

Before I start, a quick joke about Jesus and miracles:

The comedian John Mulaney did a bit about how Jesus’ greatest miracle is none of those that I mentioned. Rather, Jesus’ greatest miracle was that he was a man in his 30s and he had 12 best friends!

The sketch goes that it’s very difficult for men, then and now, to make friends. Importantly, one cannot count as friends the people that you meet through your wife, those are your wives’ friends’ husbands. But somehow Jesus pulled it off. More amazing, Mulaney continues, Jesus did not meet these friends when he was in college, or in high school, he met them in his 30s. In fact, Mulaney goes:

“Remember when your Dad went fishing, once.

These guys, the disciples and Jesus, went fishing every day!”¹

¹ <https://mbird.com/2020/06/god-of-our-lonely-fathers/>; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jRLH8E_CpP0&feature=youtu.be

So, be thinking of your favorite of Jesus' miracles, and why; as we ask:
How come the Feeding of the 5000 has such a treasured place in the church? What made it so special, so memorable?

MIRACLES

I will venture to say that the least interesting thing about this miracle is the physics behind it.

That is, one can get hung up on why and how Jesus managed to multiply the small amounts of bread and fish into this ginormous quantity for all to eat.

I think that's asking the wrong question, so that you miss the point of the story.

There was an entire school of thought in the 19th century that said that Jesus did not perform miracles.

Thus instead of walking on water in next week's story, he was walking on a sand dune, just as Jesus, actually, on Ascension Day, climbed up a foggy mountain.

The explanation for this miracle is, then, that maybe people were just hiding the bread and Jesus shamed them into giving it away, or that it was a spiritual feast that they were enjoying and that it was that that satisfied their hunger.

But, if you are worried about that, about the physics of it, you are looking for Jesus to do a parlor trick, you are actually looking for magic.

Jesus himself is SO incredibly uninterested in his mighty works, and bends over backwards to try to prevent people from knowing, and says:

“Please don't believe in me because of these miracles, that type of faith won't last very long.

That sort of faith is always dependent on the next big show.²

But, instead, if you are wondering about what God is up to in this miracle, if it's Christ's revelation in this world you are looking for, that means you might just learn something about the Kingdom of God, how it is capable of breaking forth, all around us.

² Matthew 12.39, Luke 16.31, John 6.26.

CONTEXT:

The Feeding of the 5000 was a miracle because it foreshadows the *ongoing* miracle that will be the Church, that will be that memory and reenactment of being Christ in this world.

It's all there, the miracle is a 'Preview of Coming Attractions' of the Last Supper, and thus for our Holy Eucharist.

You can hear it as Jesus says the "Take" "Bless" "Break" and "Give."

Now we call them the Offertory, the Great Thanksgiving, the Fraction, and the Communion.³

Those echoes are the miracle that the Church believes in and puts into action in so many ways.

It's the miracle of those who drop off food for our pop-up food pantry, the miracle of the decades of service and leadership in FACETS, the miracle of the countless hot meals delivered for the countless of strangers.

And indeed it's the miracle of the sinner transformed at the communion rail by the Body and Blood of Christ broken and shared with all of us.

That's the miracle that Jesus seems interested in, not how it happens, but that no one is ever the same after the act.

COMMUNION:

We fall short of what's promised by this tremendous miraculous disturbance of physics, of the natural world... of course we do.

It reminds me of that moment, that happens every once in while in our service, late in Communion, you can sense it, people are looking around on both side of the rail, they are looking at what's in the cup or what's in the paten containing the bread. There is this general sense of "We are running out."

And what I always do, I don't think I am alone, this is human nature, you start rationing, you start breaking the wafers in half, start giving out little sips of wine, you look at the row of how many people are left and think:

³ Charles Allen. "When Worlds Break Open- Mt 14:13-21" *Encounters* 65.1 (2004) 76.

“That person does not receive.... he/ she takes a blessing”
I might just make it with what we have.

We start rationing. We should be thinking that we are not going to worry about running out, because there is always more room in God’s kingdom. That’s Jesus’ instinct, that Jesus’ theology of abundance versus one of scarcity. In fact, in Jesus’ economy, there is enough to have leftovers!

CONCLUSION:

Instead the disciples speak for all of us when they reply to Jesus and say: “We have nothing.”⁴

And, if only, if only those were our biggest problems around food and scarcity in this country and in the world was that liturgical mix-up, if that was our only difficult about inclusion and about who comes to the table.

And, *if only* we could get back in the church! I would love to have overly complex discussions with our vergers about whether or not we will have enough bread and wine.

Jesus, though, is able to provides a miraculous meal out of so little, because God works through us in our limitedness, our sinfulness, and our brokenness.

Now, I know there is a prayer to consecrate extra bread and wine. But, what we don’t have—as priest, or as humans—the ability to do what Jesus did, we can’t make more bread out of nothing.

But, one more time, that’s not the point of the story. The point of the miracle is what happens next so that what’s been said about the Eucharist, could be said about the Feeding of the 5000:

their “purpose... is not to change bread and wine, but to change you and me:” through that miracle, on the hill in Galilee or every time we share bread today: “it is *we* who are to become Christ for one another, and a sign to the world that is yet to hear his name.”⁵ **AMEN.**

⁴ Matthew 14.17

⁵ Robert F. Taft. 2000. “What Does Liturgy Do? Toward a Soteriology of Liturgical Celebration: Some Theses,” in *Primary Sources of Liturgical Theology*, ed. Dwight Vogel. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 143-4.