

The Making of a Miracle

In today's Gospel passage, we see that Jesus has gone to try to get away for a bit of a respite. There is a piece of the Gospel text which we did not read this morning which explains why Jesus was seeking some solitude. After giving His teaching of the Kingdom of Heaven through the use of parables in the previous chapter, Jesus went back to Nazareth, His hometown where He did some teaching and a few miracles but got frustrated when the townspeople were questioning His credentials and showed little faith in Him. At this time, Matthew tells us, Herod had John the Baptist imprisoned and Herod's wife connived a way to have John the Baptist killed after Herod gave an oath to his step-daughter when she wowed the guests at a feast Herod hosted by dancing for them. Part of Jesus' desire to get away may have been to avoid being arrested by Herod. So, we have Jesus trying to find some 'me time,' if you will.

But that all gets put aside when people from other towns heard that Jesus was near where they lived. Jesus' reaction is not one of annoyance, but rather compassion. This sort of compassion is the gut-wrenching type that moves one to action. This sort of compassion contrasts with seeing a bad situation and being thankful that you are not in it. It also contrasts with the reaction of seeing something, feeling bad about it yet going on with your normal routine as if nothing happened. It also contrasts with the reaction of doing something that makes you feel good, that you reacted to a situation and helped out. The reaction Jesus had was to help those in need, those who were sick.

Once the sick were healed, it became obvious that it was too late for the people to go and get food for themselves from the nearest grocery store or

restaurant. Giving us just the details of having 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish, Jesus provides such a banquet for the people that there are leftovers. Matthew had crafted his telling of this miracle 'banquet in the desert' to purposely have the reader make specific connections, drawing contrasts between what Jesus did and what happened in those other connections. Since Matthew makes a comparison throughout his Gospel account between Moses and Jesus, asserting that Jesus is the new Moses to lead the people to the promised land of the Kingdom of Heaven, the first connection would be with the manna that the people of the Exodus received when being led by Moses in the wilderness. The second connection would be the feeding by Elisha of the 100 people with 20 loaves of barley and some corn. This connection would show that Jesus was greater than Elisha in that Jesus fed more people with less.

The third connection that Matthew would have intended was with the banquet hosted by Herod which he includes in his Gospel account prior to Jesus hosting this 'banquet in the desert.' We see such a contrast between Herod's banquet and this desert meal that it serves to highlight several things. First, there is a disconnect between the average citizen and the upper crust, the elites who control things. Herod had invited those in his court and the leaders of Galilee, all who supported Herod and would do his bidding. On the other hand, Jesus welcomed all who came out to the wilderness to see and hear Him. Jesus had only one criterion to be met before they got the food and that was 'are you hungry?' If the answer was 'yes' then they were fed. Jesus did not worry about what town they lived in, who they supported politically or any other difference that separated people. If they were there, they got fed.

This brings us to another connection that Matthew makes in his Gospel account and that is with the future meal that Jesus shares with His disciples at the Last Supper. This meal, though much smaller in scope had wider ramifications for those who partook in that meal and for all those who partake in the remembering of that meal when they receive the consecrated bread and wine during Communion. It is in the sharing of this meal where we acknowledge the fulfillment of the covenant through Jesus and anticipate the Kingdom of God in all of its fullness and glory.

Throughout all of these meals, excluding Herod's feast, we see a God present who acts through others to make the miracle happen. In each of these meals - in the manna, in the barley loaves and in the bread of Jesus, we see a God who gives us not just what we need at the time but more. The 'more' may not be realized at the time of the feeding, but God has promised us that there will be more than we can even imagine if we stay true to God's word.

With a Gospel reading such as the miracle of feeding the 5000, we really cannot and should not ignore the 'elephant in the room' - namely the miracle itself. As is the reaction to any occurrence which we cannot explain through logic and science, there have been many hypotheses put forth to explain how Jesus could feed so many people with so little food. Without going into all those possible explanations of how this miracle could be pulled off, whatever the cause, the people who were there had enough to eat and there were leftovers, an abundant amount of leftovers. A miracle has been defined as some occurrence that defies explanations, an occurrence that seems to go against the laws of nature. But there are things that are described as a miracle even though we know how it happens. For example, the birth of a child is often described as the 'miracle of birth.' This

description is used especially when there were difficult circumstances surrounding the pregnancy and birth. Sometimes, the coming to life of all the flora and fauna after a long, hard winter has been described as a miracle of nature. Even though we know the processes by which these things happen, we still call them a miracle.

What we need to acknowledge is that God is present in the world and is still creating by way of miracles. Sometimes, we can figure out the 'how' of something happened, but God provides the 'why' something happens. It can be frustrating in not having the answer to the why question, especially when bad things happen, but we need to have the trust and confidence in God that in the end, it will work out for the good. Paul reminds us in his letter to the Romans that this good will be greater than any bad times that we may experience. Because of our trust in God and confidence in the promises of God, there is the assurance that if it isn't good yet, then God is not done yet. What we need to do is to have the eyes, ears and heart to recognize that God is still in our midst and acts for us, giving us miracles when we need them to be fed with what God knows we need at the time.

YouTube links:

Gospel and Sermon: <https://youtu.be/3MIpUCXx1lk>

Service: https://youtu.be/BBz64pSr_fI