

## **A Most Miraculous Miracle**

### **Matthew 14:13-21**

“John is dead. My beloved cousin, killed by that despicable Herod. All for a foolish promise made to his stepdaughter. If it wasn’t for her equally murderous mother, my cousin might still be alive. Yes, in prison, but at least still living. I need to get away to have time to process my grief over this devastating loss.” These could well have been the thoughts of Jesus at the introduction to this week’s reading.

So, Jesus and the disciples set out in a boat to a quiet place where they could all process the news that John had been killed, after all several of them had been John’s disciples originally and would have felt their own grief over his death. But solitude would be hard to find. Jesus’ popularity was such that the people, upon learning where Jesus was heading, followed along the shoreline to meet him when he landed on the other side of the lake.

Even though he needed rest, Jesus had compassion on the masses that had followed them. He took the time to heal the sick who were brought to him. As the day grew long, the disciples asked Jesus to send the crowds away. The people were hungry and needed to go somewhere to buy food to eat. I’m sure the disciples were shocked when Jesus said to them, “You give them something to eat.”

“Teacher, we only have two fish and five small loaves of bread here. That’s not enough to feed us, let alone the thousands gathered here on the hillside,” came their response. Jesus responded that they should bring their meager offerings to him. Then something utterly amazing happened!

Jesus raised the fish and loaves toward heaven and gave thanks. We are not told if he gave thanks for the food or thanks to God for what would happen next. In any event, after praying he returned the food to the disciples and told them to distribute it among those gathered. Once everyone was fed and satisfied, there remained 12 baskets of leftovers that were gathered by the disciples. Understand, these were not crumbs, but portions that could have fed the crowd a second time.

We are all familiar with this story. It is remarkable that the story appears in all four of the Gospel books, although with slightly different telling in each. All the Gospel writers felt this was significant enough to include in their retelling of Jesus’ story that we need to ask ourselves, “what are we to learn from this?” I believe there at least three take-aways in this story.

First, we are reminded that God is love. We read that Jesus had compassion on the gathered group, even though he would have preferred to be alone. And his is compassion in action. In this case his compassion was expressed in not only healing the sick that were brought to him, but also providing food for the hungry. As we follow Jesus

throughout his ministry, we can see his focus on compassion for those he with whom he comes in contact. By expressing his compassion freely, he invites peace in the world, an end to hunger, and spiritual wholeness for all people.

Second, this account of Jesus interacting with the disciples and the gathered crowd is all about how to be a disciple. Jesus himself did not feed the 5,000 gathered on the hillside, he assigned that task to his disciples. God has entrusted us with an awesome responsibility, to be his representatives here on earth to continue to carry out the ministry started by Jesus so long ago. We are God's hands and feet in our community, his work is accomplished through us every day. Jesus says, "... 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'" This is how we express our faith in Jesus, through acts of compassion to others around us.

Third, we are reminded that when we need it the most God will give us the power to work for good. Have you ever felt that you were ill prepared for a certain task or event in your life, but when all was said and done realized that you had made it through, and made it through well? That was the presence of God with you in the tough stuff. God will take your two fish and five loaves of bread and multiply them in a way that will leave you amazed, just as the disciples were amazed on the Judean hillside. The lesson that the disciples learned still applies to us

today. When we work together following the lead of Jesus, we will have all we need and perhaps even more than enough.

I will share this story with you about several people coming together to make a miracle for one elderly woman. Peggy Noonan, speechwriter for Ronald Regan relates this story:

Frances Green was an eighty-three-year-old woman who lived by herself on Social Security in a town just outside San Francisco. She had little money, but for eight years she'd been sending one dollar a year to the Republican National Convention.

Then one day Frances got an RNC fund-raising letter in the mail, a beautiful piece on thick, cream-colored paper with black-and-gold lettering. It invited the recipient to come to the White House to meet President Ronald Regan. She never noticed the little RSVP card that suggested a positive reply needed to be accompanied by a generous donation. She thought she'd been invited because they appreciated her dollar-a-year support.

Frances scraped up every cent she had and took a four-day train ride across America. Unable to afford a sleeper, she slept sitting up in coach. Finally, she arrived at the White House gate: a little elderly woman with white hair, white powder all over her face, white stockings, an old hat with white netting, and an all-white dress, now yellow with age. When she got up to the guard at the

gate and gave her name, however, the man frowned, glanced over his official list, and told her that her name wasn't there. She couldn't go in. Frances Green was heartbroken.

A Ford Motor Company executive who was standing in line behind her watched and listened to the little scenario. Realizing something was wrong, he pulled Frances aside and got her story. Then he asked her to return at nine o'clock the next morning and meet him there. She agreed. In the meantime, he made contact with Anne Higgins, a presidential aide, and got a clearance to give her a tour of the White House and introduce her to the president. Regan agreed to see her, "of course."

The next day was anything but calm and easy at the White House. Ed Meese had just resigned. There had been a military uprising abroad. Reagan was in and out of high-level secret sessions. But Frances Green showed up at nine o'clock, full of expectation and enthusiasm.

The executive met her, gave her a wonderful tour of the White House, then quietly led her by the Oval Office, thinking maybe, at best, she might get a quick glimpse of the president on her way out. Members of the National Security Council came out. High-ranking generals were coming and going. In the midst of all the

hubbub, President Reagan glanced out and saw Frances Green. With a smile, he gestured her into his office.

As she entered, he rose from his desk and called out, “Frances! Those darn computers, they fouled up again! If I’d known you were coming, I would have come out there to get you myself.” He then invited her to sit down, and they talked leisurely about California, her town, her life, and family.

The president of the United States gave Frances Green a lot of time that day – more than he had. Some would say it was time wasted. But those who say that didn’t know Ronald Reagan. He knew this woman had nothing to give him, but she needed something he could give her. And so, he (as well as the Ford executive) took time to be kind and compassionate.

It doesn’t take great wealth or possessions to show compassion to another person. Jesus proved that to the 5,000 people gathered on that hillside with only two fish and five small loaves of barley bread. His compassionate act was a miracle for those gathered that day. The good news of this story is that God’s compassion continues today for the 8 billion people who call the earth their home. Just like the disciples in Jesus’ story, or the Ford executive and Ronald Regan in Peggy Noonan’s story, each of us is called to partner with God in making fullness of life a reality today for the world that God loves. AMEN

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