

John 6:1-21
July 25, 2021

Signs

The miracle of life sits all around us. A miracle is something wondrous and amazing. Does it mean more? As you know, I have been away on vacation for the last two weeks.

I traveled west by car to visit family. I was able to see my father, younger sister, and one of my sons, who all live in St. Louis; another of my sons in Kirksville, Missouri; my older sister in California; and my oldest son in Denver, Colorado. Along the way I drove through several states; Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah, and Colorado. Some of them were first time visits.

Also along the way there were sights to see; the Petrified Forest and the Grand Canyon; the Mojave Desert and the Pacific Ocean and the Golden Gate Bridge which I drove across but did not see because it was engulfed in a cloud, the Bonhomme Salt Flats where they set the speed records and the Great Salt Lake, and mountains all around and everywhere.

Part of what surprised me on this long journey of over 5,000 miles was how much of our country is essentially a desert. From Texas to California and back across to Colorado is arid, not unlike the world of the Bible.

It was on my way back through Colorado that I really saw the difference between the arid desert conditions and the lush green and heavily watered lands that are so much more common here and in most of the places I have lived.

I am reminded of the question Jesus asks in the Sermon on the mount; "Is not life more than what you think it is?" The same question is at work when we come to the two gospel stories up for consideration this day; The Feeding of the 5,000 and Jesus Walking on the Water.

The temptation is always to see life in an everyday kind of way, to see one another in an everyday, every person sort of way. Conversely, we see the feeding stories of the gospels as remarkable, even unbelievable events, and they are. Very often sermons about them are attempts to draw out and explain the miracle and its meaning. But here they are not called miracles, but signs. Sometimes I believe that Jesus was actually pointing us to the ability to see everyday occurrences as miracles too. Every meal we eat is a miracle.

That is what I noticed when after a week in the desert I drove back into the temperate zone where the grass grows tall and the trees high. What a miracle it all is! What a wonder it is that the incredible chain of events that puts food in the store works so much of the time. Though we know it doesn't work for everyone some of the time, that is no reason not to acknowledge the reality that there is enough food for everyone.

At its foundation, life is miraculous. Even the scientists speak of a moment before there were any living things when the first cell came to life and began to divide, and they can not account for that moment. But here they are called signs, and signs always point beyond themselves.

Other than the crucifixion and the fact of the resurrection, the Feeding of the Multitude is the only story that appears in all four gospels. In both stories, the followers of Jesus are stretched beyond themselves and their overly down-to-earth view of life.

To be sure, a realistic view of the possibilities is necessary for anyone who wants to be healthy and well-adjusted. The gospel requires of us a loyalty to truths about reality. But once we are there, we are called to see even the mundane things as miraculous;

“Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat? He asked, *but only to test them*. He already had in mind what he was going to do. Here in John’s gospel Jesus doesn’t say, “*You give them something to eat,*” and in the disciple’s encounter with Jesus in the boat there is no interchange with Peter who first succeeds and then fails, but only, “It is I, don’t be afraid.”

Here this moment is captured again in the blink of an eye when five loaves and two fish fed a multitude and the water held under the feet of Jesus. Each day of our lives is enhanced and made richer and fuller when in addition to the mundane things that we can take for granted, we are also able to be connected in some

way to that first light of creation, the first living, breathing beings, and to the mysterious power that established and sustains life.

We do not share the immediate circumstances of those who sat on that lakeside shore or watched from whatever safety they found in that boat. But we do share their general circumstances. The miracle of life is all around us. We live in this wondrous place that points beyond itself not only to the creator and sustainer of life, but also to the Redeemer and forgiver of sins. Turns out that the power that creates and sustains is personal, and loves and forgives. Too often we share the world’s unbelief. Today may we share the faith and love that Jesus displayed when he fed the multitude and walked on the water.

Finally, let us join in Paul’s prayer, that sums it all up for us today:

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Amen.

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