

5 years ago, and just a few months before the birth of his first child, my stepbrother had an accident that left him paralyzed from the waist down. About 3 years ago, he was able to test out a futuristic bionic device that allowed him to ‘walk’ again. While the device is quite costly, it is clear that in the near future, those who have suffered paralyzing injuries will be able to ‘walk’ again; with the aid of devices like the one he tested.

As we look today at the 4<sup>th</sup> of 5 stories in our ‘Gone Fishing’ series, I want to invite us to consider what qualifies as a miracle. For my brother and his family, I suspect this fits their definition of a miracle.

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This morning’s reading is Mark’s version of a miracle story that’s found in each of the 4 NT gospels. And here’s a trivia question: can anyone name the only other ‘miracle’ that’s included in all 4 of the gospels? (The Resurrection!) So, no matter your definition of a miracle, it’s significant that of the miracles Jesus performed, only the feeding of the 5,000 and some form of the resurrection, are found in all four of the Gospels.

Our tendency is to attribute these miracles of Jesus, to Jesus. After all, he *IS* the Son of God. But in a survey the miracle stories of the gospels, we find that Jesus is extremely reluctant to take credit for miracles. More often than not Jesus tells those who experience a miraculous healing: “*your* faith has made you well.” The miracle, Jesus seems to emphasize, is in large measure, dependent on you – on *your* faith.

This same dynamic is at work in Mark’s story of the feeding of the 5,000. When his disciples pragmatically ask Jesus to dismiss the crowd to any nearby diner, Jesus says to his disciples, in v. 37, “*You* give them something to eat.” This agrees with Matthew’s version of this story. According to Matthew 14:16, when the disciples ask Jesus to send the crowds away, he says, “They don’t need to go away. *You* give them something to eat.”

The disciples respond to Jesus by pointing out that their resources are limited; that it would take more than half a year’s salary to buy provisions sufficient to feed such a crowd. v. 37 tells us how Jesus replies to their concern, asking them, “What

are your resources?” Jesus, it seems, isn’t interested in what the disciples don’t have; he wants to know what they do have.

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This reminds me of the OT story in Exodus 3, when Moses encounters God at a burning bush. In Ex. 3 God calls Moses to liberate the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt. At one point, attempting resist God’s call, Moses asks, “But what if no one believes me or pays attention to me... or says, ‘The LORD didn’t appear to you!’” God replies to Moses asking, “What have you got in your hands?” (What are your resources?)

Unlike the Exodus story, where God then turns Moses’ staff into a snake, Mark does not describe a Harry Potter moment where 2 fish and 5 loaves of bread are miraculously transformed and multiplied before the eyes of the crowd. Rather than describing *how* the miracle occurs, Mark tells us very simply that the disciples obediently provide Jesus their paltry resources. Then, as we do during the Sacrament of Holy Communion, Jesus takes these resources, looks to heaven, blesses the bread, breaks it, and gives it to his disciples to share with the crowd. And somehow, after 5,000 people are fed, there are leftovers!

So what’s the miracle in this case? Is it that thousands have had their hunger satisfied? Or is it that no one in the crowd hoarded what might feed someone else? Or is it that the disciples were willing to loosen their grip on the meager resources they possessed? Yes, yes, and yes.

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I think it’s difficult for most of us to relate to hunger. Even when we don’t eat 3 squares a day, it’s usually because we’ve chosen to skip a meal. Our primary question is not *IF* we will eat, but, “How will it affect my diet?”

Fast food establishments don’t help the cause by providing us a complete array of unhealthy meal choices... usually a burger, fries, and a coke, complete with the invitation, “Would you like to super-size that?” Our ability to over-consume unhealthy foods, to even have the option of dieting, is hard to stomach when we notice that hungry people are all around us. We ought to be

disturbed that every 3 seconds a child dies because of hunger or diseases related to malnutrition.

But what do we do when we hear data like this? Isn't our tendency to do just what the disciples did? We go to God and we say, “This is too much for us to deal with, please send them away.” Send the problem away. In the scripture passage, it's clear that the disciples' initial reaction to the problem of hungry people is to send the needy away to fend for themselves. [NIMBY] Don't we, like those disciples, see the problem of hungry people but feel too overwhelmed to address it?

For most of us, it is not that we don't care. It's not that we lack compassion. We simply believe we do not have the resources to address the problems we see. A big problem, we think, requires a big – a miraculous – solution. Some of us may say, ‘they just need to get a job’ while others say, ‘we need to make sure the government does more.’ But either approaches implies that *someone else* needs to do something because we are powerless. Our resources are too meager!

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But what is Jesus' response when we say, ‘we don't have a way to help’? Jesus says, “You give them something to eat.” You do something. I am not asking to do something with what you don't have. I am asking you to do something with what you do have.

It's as if Jesus is saying, “Don't look to me to solve the problem; don't pray for a miracle; just do something about it.” And remarkably, the disciples' turn over what little is available, even though that little bit is the total substance of what they have for themselves. And somehow, God super-sizes the resources they release...

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Albert Einstein once said, “The way I see it, you have two ways to live your life: the one as if no miracles exist, and the other as though everything is a miracle.” The artist Pablo Picasso concurred. Picasso said that to him, it was miraculous that the human body does not simply dissolve like sugar in bathwater.

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For me, it's utterly miraculous that the disciples gave up the resources that were available to them.

They unclenched their fearful grasp and shared what they had.

Barbara Brown Taylor, an Episcopal priest, writes, “The problem with miracles is that we tend to get mesmerized by them, focusing on God's responsibility and forgetting our own. Miracles let us off the hook, because we don't think we have what it takes. But Jesus says, ‘You do something about this.’ Not me, but you; not my bread, but yours, not sometime or somewhere else, but right here and right now. *Stop looking for someone else* to solve the problem because right there in your own hands is everything you need. Stop waiting for a miracle and participate in one instead.” That bears repeating: “Stop looking for someone else to solve the problem because right there *in your own hands* is everything you need. Stop waiting for a miracle and *participate* in one instead.”

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I certainly believe this is a message each of us needs to attend to personally, but I also want to say something about the message for our church. As a church, as a body, I believe this scripture affirms that everything we need to fulfill God's vision for our church in this community and in the world, is already here (in our hands). All the resources God can use to super-size our ministry and mission are already available! Our discipleship task is to grow in our ability to release the things we're clinging to and then watch what God will do.

Let's practice taking the resources we have, whatever they are, thanking God for them, and releasing them. Once we let go and let God, we'll be amazed by what God will do in and thru our church. Amen.