

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

July 29, 2018

The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

John 6:1-20

2 Kings 4:42-44

Psalm 145:10-18

Ephesians 3:14-21

Do you ever get tired of waiting for a miracle? I mean do you ever get tired of waiting on God to make a difference in your life? To take away some unspoken pain, to save a relationship, to heal a sickness? My guess is we have all prayed for a miracle at one time or another. Some prayers were probably answered. While other prayers may have seemed to fall away in silence.

I find it interesting how much we have come to place our hopes in miracles – especially when we come to a place in our lives when we have run out of resources, when we don't have answers, when the difficult, heartbreaking things in life are just too overwhelming. We find ourselves down on our knees praying for God's help and we wait. We wait for a sign. A shift. An answer.

That's certainly one way to do it – waiting for God to provide the relief. But when I think about it...when we get to those places of hopelessness, we often become passive – waiting on some external catalyst to save us because we have simply run out of answers, when what is reasonable and rational simply aren't evident. Now to be sure, there are plenty of times when we have to wait on God's intervention, when we are forced to wait passively for answers. But maybe there are more times than we realize, when God is waiting on us to step forward. When God is waiting on us to say, here I am Lord. Use me. Use me in this miracle making process. Use me to help find a solution.

Today, I am going to ask you to think about miracles a little differently than you have before. In particular, when it comes to our Gospel reading...I want you to think about the little boy in our story. Who here today even noticed that there was a boy in our Gospel reading? I didn't...at first. And, worth noting...all four Gospels tell the story of the Jesus feeding thousands with only a little bread and a little fish. But, John is the only Gospel that mentions the boy. You all know - when something is unique in scripture, it's usually worth our time to consider what it has to teach us. So, take a closer look. What does the boy do in our reading? Now, I want you to notice another group of folks...the disciples. What are they doing in our text?

And, one more question....when you hear the phrase "loaves and fishes" what one word do you associate with this phrase? I hope the word "miracle" comes to mind. In fact, most often when I hear about this story it is usually referred to as the "miracle of the loaves and fishes." That miracle where Jesus comes in and feeds 5,000 people in a some magical, unexplainable way. But, I think the reality in this story is a bit different and we should take notice.

There are a couple of important things going on in this story that happen before the people are fed. The first is that the disciples are wrestling with how to feed the people. Jesus has just asked them..."Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" The disciples are caught in a

dilemma, trying to solve a problem of what they perceive as scarcity. They are essentially looking at the basic equation...their brain starts ticking away at the logistics.

There are x number of people which translates into 6 months wages in order to provide the appropriate amount of food for this crowd. It's an equation they can't solve. They can't solve it because they are looking at only one solution. One solution that is logically not possible. There is not enough money to buy food. Period. I imagine them looking at Jesus, shrugging their shoulders, assuming they have done all that they could do. And, so, they become passive, out of options, waiting for some miracle but doubting the possibilities.

And then, there is this boy. We know very little about him except that Andrew notices him standing there with 5 loaves and 2 fish. Imagine that boy, in the crowd of 5,000. One of so many individuals gathered together waiting for Jesus. Imagine him hearing the debate the disciples are having with Jesus – we don't have enough money, there isn't enough food, we can't do this thing that you are asking. And in his humble gesture, the boy steps forward...I have 5 loaves and 2 fish. It isn't much, but it's all that I have.

I am struck by this innocent gesture of kindness. For all we know, those loaves and fishes were all he had for his family. Maybe his family was relying on him to feed the household. We don't know his story but we can imagine he gave what little he had to help solve a problem. He stepped up do something. Not looking at logistics or reasonable explanations. On the surface it seemed insignificant but from his simple gesture, 5,000 were fed.

So, what kind of miracle is really going on?

Jim Somerville, the pastor at First Baptist in Richmond, argues that this story of the loaves and fishes isn't a miracle of Jesus multiplying the bread and fish. That would be the passive way to understand this story. In other words...the people were in need and Jesus simply created more food to eat. If we only read the other Gospel accounts we might go away with this understanding of a miracle. But, this is the Gospel of John. And there is this boy. This boy who is the catalyst for the miracle.

This boy who was incredibly brave and compassionate as he offered all of the food that he had. And maybe, just maybe, people noticed. Maybe there was someone else in the crowd who stood up and offered what they had. And maybe, just maybe someone else followed. Maybe the miracle in this story isn't a miracle of Jesus swooping in, taking care of a situation, as people stood around debating what **they couldn't do**. Maybe, instead, it was a miracle of people realizing, through this one boy's example, what **they could do**.

Could it be that the real miracle was a change of heart? A change of heart in the individuals gathered there that day, a change where they started to realize that they could do something, too. A change of heart where one small gesture is added to another and another and soon an entire population was fed.

I ran across this poem which appropriately is called “*A Poem About Miracles*” and it sums up in my mind, the boy in our story from John.

*This is a world of miracles and wonder!
 Where in the face of death, exhaustion, sorrow,
 Every day someone chooses love
 Serves the poor, gives a shirt to the naked, water to the thirsty,
 Shelter to the homeless, food to the hungry.
 Where in spite of the vast ugliness,
 And amid the ruins and the ashes, someone plants a garden,
 Makes a small poem of beauty that few will ever see,
 And like artists everywhere, works without acclaim.
 I don't want to hear about miracles-as-magic-tricks,
 Changing water into wine, stones into loaves of bread.
 Tell me about miracles of goodness, kindness, beauty, caring, sharing,
 Undeserved love.
 Those are the miracles I want to hear about!*¹

So, in spite of ugliness. In spite of selfishness, in spite of fear and misunderstanding and judgement...what if we begin to look at ourselves, not as passive observers waiting for some other worldly miracle but as capable, gifted individuals who have been given opportunities to create miracles of goodness, kindness, beauty, caring, and sharing. Maybe that's the miracle of the loaves and fishes. The undeserved love that we pour out to one another. Not because we have an overabundance to share but because we have just enough to share. Not because we have sat around waiting for someone else to solve the problem but because we realize we have something to contribute. And we step forward, I have some bread and some fish.

I want you to hear this...You have something to contribute. That's the miracle. As our reading from Ephesians reminds us, Jesus is at work within us and is able to accomplish so much more than all we can ask or imagine. Notice the words – Jesus is at work within us (you and me) to accomplish more than we can imagine.

What is Jesus working to accomplish through you? What is your role in the miracle? Amen.

¹ <http://northcoastview.blogspot.com/2014/06/a-poem-about-miracles.html>