

The Rev. Rose Anne Lonsway
The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost
2 Kings 4:42-44, Psalm 145:10-19, Ephesians 3:14-21, John 6:1-21
St. Paul's Episcopal Church
July 28, 2024

May the words of my mouth and the mediations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, Our God, our strength and our Redeemer.

It would appear that we are inundated with miracles this morning. The reading from 2 Kings tells of Elisha, the prophet who replaced Elijah doing the fourth miracle that establishes him as the legitimate heir to Elijah. Previous miracles were the poor widow who receives life giving oil that saves her family, an only son is brought back from the dead and poisonous gourds made safe to eat. The fourth miracle is analogous to the miracle in today's Gospel, though not quite as spectacular. One hundred people are fed with twenty loaves of bread. This was particularly impressive since it was a time of extreme scarcity and war. A man offered his gifts to the prophet – the “first fruits” of his crops.

Elisha, rather than accepting his due as prophet, elects to give the food to God's people in need. Of course, his servant questions the wisdom of this move – “How can I set this before a hundred people? Elisha responds “Give it to the people and let them eat, for thus says the Lord, They shall eat and have some left”.

This not only demonstrates that the word of God is true – it shows the unending, often overwhelming abundance of God when all seems to be overwhelmed by scarcity. God is faithful. God is trustworthy and true. (Karen C, Sapio, Douglas T. King Feasting on the Word Year B Vol 3, pg 267

Turning to the Gospel reading, we are met with a similar miracle, embedded in other miracles as well. Jesus, being followed by overwhelming crowds is performing healing miracles as he teaches.

A similar conversation occurs between Jesus and his disciple Philip as did between Elisha and his servant – the response again being - more than we have or can provide. And Jesus, like Elisha, makes it happen. He blesses the baskets of food and distributes it - the five thousand are fed, all eat their fill and there are 12 baskets left over. This must have been a real treat for those in the crowd who struggled to have enough food on a daily basis.

The miracle of feeding is followed by Jesus walking on the water to be with the disciples in a boat, fearful of the storm they were in, although they seemed to be more fearful of Jesus walking on the water and instantaneously ending up safely on the shore.

So what is there to learn from these occurrences? There is always debate about whether or not these stories happened just the way they are presented.

Some commentators offer that rather than Jesus expanding the loaves and fishes, that those who were secreting food, broke it out and shared all they had.

Commentator John M. Buchanan offers these words for our consideration:

“ For the writer of the fourth Gospel, the point of this story and others is not the action itself, in this case the healing of the sick . Rather, the action is a “sign” pointing to Jesus. Crowds persist wherever he goes, seeking, hoping for healing, but, John insists, also looking for a sign. Literalism is not only inadequate here, but distracting, as it is throughout scripture. In designating these two incidents “signs” – Jesus feeding the five thousand and then, equally astonishing, walking on water – the author of the Fourth Gospel invites readers to ponder and discern meaning rather than facticity.

John wants us to dig deeper, beyond the events themselves, beyond ‘Did this really happen’ or ‘How did it happen?’ to their enduring and saving truth. The story of the feeding of the five thousand is told, with slight variation in all four Gospels. It is clearly central to who Jesus is and what he means. John tells it gorgeously with attention to aesthetics. Why does he include ‘there was a great deal of grass in the place’ unless he wanted to introduce the idea of ‘abundance’ lushness, the good fertility and sensuality of God’s creation?’ (Connections Year B Vol 3, pg 194)

No matter which explanation captures our attention, we can take away the fact that Jesus is the Son of God, bringing the Kingdom of God to earth and bringing forth God’s great love and abundance.

Abundance made manifest in relationship, through hospitality and the amazing love of God.

Further proof of Jesus as Son of God is given by Max J. Lee who states

“The name of YHWH as “I am” is translated from the Hebrew by the Septuagint as *ego eimi*. Jesus uses the same designation *ego eimi* to identify himself in verse 20 to the frightened disciples, although the NRSV translates the phrase as “it is I”. Jesus is the “I Am” and author of a new exodus. While Moses led Israel out of slavery from Egypt, Jesus will liberate humanity from slavery to sin (John 8:34) and lead all who believe in him, Jew and Gentile alike, to a grander salvation. The identification of Jesus as “I Am” also anticipates a series of seven “I AM” statements in John’s Gospel (6:35; 8:12; 10:7; 10:11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1), which further reveal the divine person and character of God’s Son”. (Connections Year B Vol 3, pg 193)

Further proof of God – Jesus as the great I AM, God with us. Our God who walks with us, provides for us, and satisfies our hunger. He satisfies more than physical hunger; the spiritual hunger of our very souls are filled through the love and grace of our God.

Contemplating the filling of spiritual souls brought to mind the anniversary of the Philadelphia Eleven – those brave, determined women who participated in the miracle of changing a cultural practice that had stood for untold centuries. Tomorrow, July 29, 1974 is the 50th anniversary of the first ordination of women in the Episcopal Church, including one we claim as our own in the Diocese of Ohio, the Reverend Nancy Wittig, who served as rector of St. Peter’s Lakewood. Some of you have seen the documentary made to commemorate the Philadelphia Eleven here at St. Paul’s earlier this year.

This ordination took place two years before affirmed and explicitly authorized by the General Convention. There was an emergency meeting of Bishops who after much protest and discussion, declared the women irregularly ordained rather than declaring the ordinations invalid. Their path was not smooth and not only the women, but many of the priests and Bishops who supported them paid a heavy price. For example:

On Sunday, November 10, 1974, Alison Cheek celebrated the Eucharist at [St. Stephen and the Incarnation Episcopal Church](#) in [Washington, D.C.](#) This first public celebration of the Eucharist in the Episcopal Church by a priest who was a woman was permitted by the church’s rector, William Wendt.^[29]

The following month, Alison Cheek and Carter Heyward were invited to celebrate the Eucharist on Sunday, December 8, at [Christ Episcopal Church](#) in [Oberlin, Ohio](#), by the rector, Peter Beebe.^{[29][30]} These events didn’t go unnoticed by the larger church, and in the summer of 1975 both Wendt and Beebe were brought to ecclesiastical trial by their dioceses and convicted of disobeying a “godly admonition” from their bishops against permitting the women to celebrate the Eucharist.^[26] (

All was not lost however.

At the 1976 General Convention, many worked to see that the irregularly-ordained women were fully recognized as priests and allowed to function as priests without any penalties.^{[31][32]}

On June 28, 2024, the 81st General Convention of the Episcopal Church, in honor of the 50th anniversary of the Philadelphia 11, approved July 29 as the date to commemorate the Philadelphia 11.^[34] (Wikipedia)

There is much more that could be told about these stories, but suffice it to say that we have explored many miracles today – miracles that took many forms, yet gives us the same outcome; the knowledge

that our God loves God's people, all people, beyond measure, that we can have a share in providing God's abundance to all and that we can be both recipients and providers of God's love through the life and example of our Lord Jesus.

So now, to confirm our desire to live into God's love, we can turn to the lesson from Ephesians. Paul has given us what is a beautiful prayer and I would like us to end by praying it now.

Please turn to the lessons for today and as we pray these verses together, please change the plural pronouns into singular – I instead of you or we, my instead of your and so on.

The Lord be with you:

Response: And also with you

Let us pray:

I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that I may be strengthened in my inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in my heart through faith, as I am being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that I may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth,

and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that I may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who by the power at work within me is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all I can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. **Amen.**

Let's go forth from this sacred place to recognize and to be a part of God's miracles in this world.
Amen.