

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Preacher: Billie Lyn Jensen
April 2, 2000

2 Chronicles 36:14-23 Destruction of the Nation
Ps. 122 Jerusalem restored; Pray for peace in Jerusalem
Ephesians 2:4-10 Grace saved you
John 6:4-15 Miracle of 5 loaves and 2 fishes

(May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight, O lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen)

Think of it! Two fish, five loaves of bread, feeding 5000 people, and 12 baskets of leftovers, to boot!

What I could do with food that had that kind of staying power. Maaan...
We could have the Pot Luck Supper to end all pot luck suppers...
And my food bill...It'd HAVE to go down.

Now THAT would really be a miracle...or would it? I'm not so sure that we really understand miracles.

* * *

Many years ago, my youngest daughter Megan came home from an Episcopal summer camp at the Claggett Conference Center in Maryland. It seems that she had met a girl, Katrin, from Germany who had heard about the "Miracle at Medjugorje, in what used to be known as *Yugoslavia*."

Apparently, The Virgin Mary appeared every day at 6:40 P.M. to four women and two young men, from 1981 on...and, according to Dr. Susan Trout, Ph.D., of the Washington Center for Attitudinal Healing, who visited in 1988, you could look at the sun without hurting yours eyes, because, as you looked, a disk--a round gray lozenge--moved in front of the sun to filter rays and prevent any damage.

Katrin wanted to know if this was a true miracle.

And Megan told her about me (it was never clear what she told her...).
Whatever...the youngster asked Megan to ask me if what was happening at Medjugorje was a miracle.

Would I please write her?

Now, how can you turn down a request like that, particularly when the child had complete trust in your ability, misplaced though it might be. So, I sat down and composed a letter. Then, crumpled it up and tossed it into the trash. I gave it another try...and that, too, ended up in the "circular file." One after another, my attempts failed...

What, in Heaven's Name, constitutes a miracle? The church has been arguing this one for years.

And then, suddenly, I had a brilliant idea: Why not ask God?! (Now, there's a thought! What a concept!)

And so, I prayed, "Well, Abba, what do you want me to tell her?"

And...miraculously...the words began flowing from my pen:

Dear Katrin,

Many people have asked if "this thing" is a miracle...or if "that thing" is a miracle...but when we look at the outward appearance of ANY thing, we fail to see it clearly. It's what's inside that counts. Therefore, if we can't see what's inside the heart of someone who, say, stares at the sun and doesn't become blind...or someone who sees Mary...then we can't judge whether or not a miracle has occurred.

A miracle has happened, however, if a person's heart is transformed from a hard and uncaring one into a tender and loving one. Therefore, if a person stares at the sun (and does not lose his sight) and is inwardly transformed, then, yes, a miracle has occurred.

It's not the lack of blindness on the outside (that is, with the physical eyes), but the lack of blindness on the inside (an open and understanding heart) that is the true miracle.

Love,

"Aunt" Lyn

P.S. But please do not stare at the sun!"

A simple enough answer for ANY child to understand. A miracle (that letter, for example), is born out of the faith of a child.

When you know for sure that something is going to happen, when there is no doubt in your heart, mind, and soul, then a miracle can occur.

You are able to "see" it. Imagine it...like a child.

In the world of miracles...
in God's Kingdom...
or, simply, if you will,
in God...
all things are possible.

That's because God is infinite, and infinity (even in mathematics) is a "house without walls," a place where possibilities, not limitations, are the realities of Life.

And the reality in today's reading was the people's need for food--food for the body--so Jesus provided it. But he also provided much, much more; for there's another kind of food that nourishes, but isn't as easily seen. Jesus talked about it when he said

"I am fed by doing the will of my Father."

Doing...the will...of...my...Father.

Now, what in the world does that have to do with miracles, let alone feeding people?

* * *

A while back, I decided to drop in on a friend of mine who lived in Olney. She and her husband are hard working people, but I was concerned about them. Worried about how they were making ends meet.

Like the disciples, they didn't have very much money.

So, on the way to their house, my mind began to wander off into a daydream:

Wouldn't it be nice if they could inherit some money? In my mind, I saw my friend go up to her mailbox, and in it was a letter telling her of an inheritance...and their money worries seemed a little farther away.

Suddenly, I was jolted out of my reverie (traffic, probably), and realized that I had been day dreaming. Miracles are nice, but perhaps I should ask our Father in Heaven what He thought of this idea. (Thy will be done, ya know.) After all, it might not be right to ask for money...

So, I prayed, "Abba, what do you think about this idea?"

And suddenly, I was surrounded by His Love (like the arms of a parent enfolding a child) and I was taken "inside" of Him...and the two of us were made one. And I was shown a man that Jesus sent to get some money out of a fish's mouth (obviously, like today's reading, NOT your average "fish story"). And I knew that it was OK to ask for money!

It was God's Will!

And there was no doubt in my mind that it was time for miracles! I was filled with this incredible energy...fed!

But, when I got to my friend's house, I said nothing about my "daydreaming." (I mean, would you?)

My friend was just getting ready to go for a walk and invited me to come along. But when we got to the street, she suddenly remembered that she hadn't yet taken in the mail...

And, yes, you've probable guessed it...

There was a letter there from a lawyer...

informing her that her Great Aunt, who had suffered from cancer, had finally, and mercifully, passed away...

and that she had left all of her money to Kathy.

Apparently, Kathy didn't know her Great Aunt very well and, therefore, was very surprised by this action. Her words of exclamation were, and I quote,

"It's a miracle!"

And my thought was "Yeees!!!"

I felt like dancing! In fact, I'm still energized TODAY!!! Because, years ago, I'd been fed...REALLY, REALLY well fed by doing the will of our Father in Heaven.

* * *

Wouldn't it be neat to live every minute of every day in the midst of that kind of incredible energy and joy? It's fun!

But life isn't like that for most of us. We move on...and life's concerns sometimes get the better of us...like...

What are we going to eat?...or
"What's for dinner, Mom?"

and, sometimes, in the midst of the world, we forget...

about miracles, and
dreams, and
that child-like faith that makes it all possible...

And we are in very good company when that happens.

Did you know that today's reading in John isn't the only story of feeding the multitudes? In Mark, there's not only the same story as in John, but an additional story, as well: where 7 loaves and a few small fish fed about 4000.

This second "feeding the multitudes" miracle ended up with 7 baskets of leftovers instead of 12.

And it doesn't end there...because the disciples get in a boat, and what should they forget to do? Bring along any food, except for one small loaf of bread...

Jesus, meanwhile, is trying to teach them about the yeast of the Pharisees, among other things.

They, on the other hand, can't see past the fact that they don't have enough to eat...and this, just after Jesus had fed a total of **9000 people on 2 separate occasions with essentially nothing!**

So, what does Jesus have to do? He has to remind them.

"...do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves among the five thousand, how many baskets full of scraps did you collect?" and they answered,

"Twelve."

"And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many baskets full of scraps did you collect?"

And they answered,

"Seven."

The he said to them

"Are you still without perception?"

In other words, "Do you still not see?"

From the information as we know it, the disciples answered both questions correctly, but it seems fairly obvious from Jesus' response, that they failed the exam.

And what about us, here in this church?

How would we have answered those same questions? The disciples' answers were technically correct. So, what was Jesus trying to get them—and us—to see?

- (1) Was it as simple as "If I can feed 9000 people with 12 loaves of bread, what are you worried about?"

Or was it something more complicated?...A slight discrepancy in the worldly logic of the situation.

You see,

5 loaves among 5000 people yielded 12 baskets of leftovers;
while

7 loaves (that's MORE food) among 4000 (that's LESS people)
left only 7 baskets.

You would think, wouldn't you, that **MORE** food among **LESS**
people would leave **MORE** leftovers, not less?

If you assume that the loaves and the baskets were roughly the
same size from one miracle to the next...and you continued the
pattern (albeit, a small one) with the amount of loaves going up,
and the number of people being fed and the leftovers going
down,

by the time you got to 11 loaves, you wouldn't have any
leftovers at all...and by the time you reach 15 loaves, you
wouldn't be able to feed a single soul!

So maybe we should think of each person fed and each basket
of leftovers as individual miracles...rather than the one miracle
of feeding the multitudes.

Perhaps, Jesus was trying to get the disciples—and us—to see
that...

- (2) The more people have, the less miracles they'll be able to
see...

kinda like

*"It's harder for a rich man
to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven
than it is for a camel
to get through the eye of a needle."*

or, that...

- (3) When people have a lot more of what they don't really need (i.e., physical food), they end up with a lot less of what they **do** need (i.e., spiritual food).

On the other hand, maybe all he really wanted was for them to

- (4) Pay attention! or to...Keep watch!

Whatever it was...What is it that you, here today, have witnessed?

Is it the retelling of two bible stories?

Two miracles?

Two questions from Jesus?

Or have I, all this time, and in each case, been feeding about 100 people...with only two fish?

You see, today's reading did not involve just one miracle

Every morsel that was taken into every mouth constituted a miracle, and every thought or idea spawned by these stories down through the ages and taken into every heart STILL constitutes a miracle;

because you can't eat God's food...

or take God's word into you being...

without being inwardly changed...

and **that's what a miracle is all about!**

That's what Katrin's letter was trying to tell us:

"It's what's inside that counts."

So, I ask you:

How many baskets of leftovers will we have collected by the end of this meal?

How many new thoughts and ideas to transform our hearts and minds?

And because we can't take them all in at a single sitting, how many baskets of "food for thought" will be leftover for the feeding of untold thousands tomorrow?

In other words, the feeding of the multitudes has never ended!

As long as these events are told, or as long as the stories that they inspired are shared, they'll continue to feed us.

You see, miracles come from the Kingdom of God; that means that they're infinite.

And it also means (Praise God) that miracles are still going on all the time...and that each and every one of them will last forever!

Amen.