

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

In the gospel of John, miracle stories or miracles are called “signs”. Now if we skip all the way to the end of chapter 20, we’ll see our author has written “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.”

There are signs all through the gospel of John, and many more in the Synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke), to say nothing of the rest of the New Testament.

In John we read of water turned into wine, lame and infirm people walking, straightened out limbs, the blind seeing, lepers cleansed, demons cast out, the dead raised to life, a miraculous feeding, walking on water. And people marvel and wonder.

It’s not so much that people are skeptical, but often folks have a hard time believing in the signs, the miracles written in our scriptures, we would like some kind of rational explanation. Now I personally am not a skeptic, I believe in miracles, the signs of Jesus, I believe in unintended consequences, unforeseen possibilities if you will, especially with God the author. With that thought in mind, we have two miracles, signs that are recounted by our gospel writer this morning, both prominent stories since the earliest days of the church.

In Jerusalem, the distrust of Jesus, the dislike of Jesus on the part of the religious authorities has been growing. So now he and his disciples are back in Galilee where large numbers of folks following, impressed by the signs, the miracles, although not really knowing who and what these signs, these miracles were pointing at. Now he’s gone up a mountain, he’s sitting with his disciples, and he sees a large crowd coming toward him. And he focuses on their need, their hunger. No one has said anything, but he knows, and he asks Philip: "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" Ever practical Philip responds: "Six months wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." Andrew speaks up: "There is a boy who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" both Philip and Andrew are right, they acknowledge the need, but the resources simply aren’t there.

But Jesus doesn’t debate, argue, explain, attempt to convince, he simply has the people sit down. He gives thanks for the loaves and the fish, and he distributes them, as much as folks wanted, to those who were there, with twelve baskets of fragments left over. And people thought of the prophet who was to come, a sign that this was he, they are ready to make him king. But Jesus is on a mission from God, he came to fulfill God’s purpose and his time is not yet.

Jesus knows the needs of his sheep, his people, and filled with compassion he meets that need. He is filled with a deep passion or feeling for the suffering of those he

sees as sheep without a shepherd. His compassion is such that he will respond to the needs, the sins of the world by offering himself on the cross. The fullness of God is in Jesus, God with us. God provided their ancestors in the wilderness with manna, in our story he gives bread and fish to an immense crowd in the wilderness, and now Jesus feeds us with spiritual food and brings about the new reality of the Kingdom of Heaven, reconciling us who were separated from our God by our sins.

The crowds, even the disciples don't understand yet, but after Holy Spirit comes, God's people will recall and understand what has happened. Honestly we still struggle with this, sometimes it seems like an unintended consequence, and unforeseen possibility. And that's the case, for us, but not for God. Think of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God."

The disciples now find themselves in a boat at night in rough, windy seas. They see Jesus coming near, they are perhaps understandably terrified. They hear Jesus speak to them. "It is I; do not be afraid." They want to take Jesus into the boat, but immediately they are at their destination. Truly this is the Son of God who formed the earth when darkness covered the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. It was a revelation that the God who said to Moses, "I AM, I AM," is to be found fully in Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of the world. Jesus knew the needs of the crowd, he knew the needs of his disciples, he knows our needs as well, at all times and in our own dark and stormy nights when we are feeling overwhelmed, small and helpless.

Beset by unintended consequences, unforeseen possibilities, and when all seems hopeless and lost by our standards, God is there, God is here. And we are redeemed, made whole, saved by the Blood of the Lamb.

AMEN