

2 Kings 4:42-44  
Psalm 145:10-19  
Ephesians 3:14-21  
John 6:1-21

Proper 12B  
St Barnabas, Bainbridge Island  
July 29, 2018  
The Rev. Karen Haig

### Do You Believe In Miracles?

When I told you last week that the lectionary makers didn't give us the feeding of the multitudes from Mark's gospel... I did know that this one was coming! I love this story. And I love it differently in John's gospel than in any of the others...

But I need to step back from that for just a minute and say that I'm very aware of the fact that I've not addressed the other readings much of late. I hope you've been following the story of the prophet Samuel's call, of his place in the life of King David, the forebearer of Jesus and the kinship and kingship Jesus' followers wanted him to emulate. David's story is amazing and what we hear today is really worth talking about – it's all worth talking about, but because we're an Episcopal church and not a Baptist or Presbyterian church, I'm pretty sure I can't stand up here and preach for 30 or 40 minutes. So I have the hard job of choosing. And I've been called to preach on the gospel these past many weeks. I still am. Even though we're in the really dicey part of the King David story, even though we're in the letter to the Ephesians, one of Paul's most beautiful letters describing what the church really can be, even though tears well up in my eyes every time I hear those beautiful words from Ephesians we heard today, we are leaving the gospel of Mark and entering in to five weeks of John's mysterious and wonderful bread of life stories, and I am called to the gospel once more. So, three years from now when we get to hear these same stories again, I will hope to preach on those other amazing and beautiful stories and letters. In the meantime, I know you have bibles... read them on your own. And then come and preach to me.

We get two miracle stories today. What do you make of them? Do they feel like "just stories?" Are they by now so familiar to you that you could tell them yourself? Do they matter to you? Do you believe in miracles? Today we hear two wonderfully familiar miracle stories, but this morning, I'd like to invite you to hear them a little differently. John is telling the story today, and John tells this story differently than Matthew, Mark and Luke do. In the other Gospels, Christ's divinity is sometimes more hidden beneath the surface. But in John, when you see Jesus, you see the Father. You see God.

"I AM," say Jesus and when he says that we hear the voice of God when God spoke to Moses, saying "Tell the people I AM sent you." *Exodus 3:14* "I AM," Jesus says. I am the light, the door, the vine, the good shepherd, the bread... I am resurrection and I am life says the Lord.

In John's gospel the dazzling light of Christ's divinity seems almost blinding, threatening to overwhelm all of the humanity Jesus also possessed. In John's gospel mostly what we get unspeakable power and mystery....

Turning water into wine. Making blind men see. Cleansing lepers. Walking on water. Feeding thousands of people with a few barley loaves and a couple of fish.

Jesus masters everything in John's gospel and what we see when he does that is the holy, the mystery, the divine. When Jesus fed those thousands of people with a couple of fish and 5 loaves of bread, well, that surely was miraculous. God, the creator of absolutely everything, the God who made the earth for our delight and our nourishment and flourishing, this is the God who provided a banquet in the wilderness that day, and satisfied all who were hungry.

Did it really happen? I think it did, but does that matter, compared to the real miracle that God in the form of Christ Jesus has been sent into the world so that every hungry soul will be filled to overflowing, with basketfuls left over, that our God is constantly offering abundantly far more than we could ask or even imagine?

A long time ago, I worked in downtown Seattle, about a mile from the ferry terminal. Every day I would walk along the waterfront, looking out over Puget Sound, back toward Bainbridge and beyond, to the Olympic Mountains. The Seattle waterfront is home to many homeless, some of whom are quite broken and live in worlds of their own making, worlds very different from ours. Because I walked along the waterfront every day, I came to recognize lots of the people who lived on the street... the big, round man with the great laugh who sold lollipops for a quarter, the much too skinny blond Viet Nam vet with the sign that said "I ain't lyin', I need a beer," the proud woman whose cracked and calloused feet spilled out of her broken brown shoes, and the young woman I said hello to every day, the one who talked back only rarely, and in a language only she could understand.

Every morning and every evening, I would walk by these people, mostly just seeing them out of the corner of my eye, but occasionally really seeing them, and occasionally having the kinds of conversation that turned us human for one another. There were days when I wondered and worried and said my prayers differently because someone had gone missing for a while. That was especially true when it was that beautiful, broken young woman who spoke in her own language. I cannot tell you why I was so drawn to her, I just was. I can't say she was particularly drawn to me - once when I got too close to her, she let loose a wail that scared the living daylight out of me. But the fright was so small compared to her very large presence in my daily life. I always thought about her long after I'd passed her by. I felt like there was something to do, but I couldn't figure out what it was. And anyway, we didn't speak the same language...

What do you do when you want to get to know somebody? Me? I speak in the language of food. I have come to know many of you in the language of supper clubs and beach walks, bbqs and tea parties, coffee in the garden and some of the loveliest dinner parties imaginable. Left to my own devices, I will always introduce myself in the language of food. Some of you are like that too. The place you choose, the food you prepare, the ways you welcome will tell me a great deal about you. Do you prefer fragrant, spicy, messy ethnic food, or a salad with exquisite local baby lettuces? I know some people view food as fuel, but for me, food is so much more. It is art, and science and craft and welcome, nourishment, nurture and love... you can ask my husband and he'll tell you, food is my love language.

I spend hours cooking dinner many nights, whisking untold varieties of fruit vinegars into salad dressings, reducing sauces until they fill the house with their aromatic richness. There is little I love more than luxuriating in taking whatever time is required so that every dimension of flavor comes into its own fullness, filling our home with the fragrance of food prepared from pure love. And once the cooking is complete, I love it best when candles are lit, prayers are offered hands are joined in blessing. We break bread, we feed one another. Bodies, minds, hearts and souls are nourished. My very favorite moments in life are those spent with people to feed and to love.

I learned it from Jesus.

So maybe, I thought, maybe what I need to do is to figure out how to eat with this compelling woman who spoke in her own language. And so one evening on the way to the ferry, I stopped a few steps away from her. Quietly, shyly really, I asked her if I could buy her dinner. She looked angry. And she looked away. But she didn't wail at me. So I went across the street to the best little Vietnamese take out place I knew of, and bought dinner for two. The day she had wailed at me, I noticed she hadn't many teeth, so her dinner was boneless chicken, not too spicy, but with enough heat to warm her insides for a while. I had chicken too, but mine was on the bone, fragrant, spicy and sticky.

I remember that day so well... dinners in hand, I crossed the street, approaching the woman with a shyness reminiscent of school girl seeking a new friend. The woman who spoke her own language wouldn't look at me. Tentatively I said... "I brought you some dinner – it's chicken – not too spicy and there are no bones in it so it shouldn't hurt your mouth..." And that beautiful woman, the woman who had yelled and ranted, whose fingernails were black and brittle, whose hair was plastered to her head, whose shoes were lost, whose clothes barely covered her, whose eyes were so wild... that precious young woman turned her beautiful face to me and said "thank you" just as quietly and clearly as you would. It was a miracle.

And then she turned away and went back to the world of her own language.

In the many years that followed, she never spoke another word I understood. but we had dinner together every Wednesday night– she had the not-too-spicy boneless chicken, on the sidewalk of Alaskan Way, and I had the sticky, hot and sweet spicy chicken on the bone, riding the ferry back to Bainbridge Island.

Sometimes we think we need to know a lot of things. Sometimes we think knowledge is power and that all of those wild stories about Jesus doing all those seemingly impossible things with paralytics and lepers, feeding thousands of people and walking on water... we think we're smarter than that, and those stories can't possibly be true. But they are true. All of those stories tell us the truth of how Jesus acted in the world so that we could come to understand who he really is, and who we really are. Jesus fed hungry people with real food. He came to the disciples and he comes to us over and over again when we're hungry or lonely or when we're afraid, offering the true comfort that comes not with certain answers, but with the simplicity of I AM. Jesus responded to the ones around him with stunning wonders, yes. But he also responds with a nurturing, steadying and loving presence.

Both are true, and both are miracles.

Amen.