

Sermon by Mark Moline
 July 29, 2018 - Choose Life!

What an absolutely over-whelming gospel our lectionary brings us this morning. Jesus miraculously feeds the 5,000, then walks on water, and then - apparently suspends time itself as the boat arrives instantaneously at the shore. St. John does not give us a Jesus who is 'just a good teacher and/or a good prophet'. As God incarnate, Jesus was a wonder worker.

However, even as we proclaim his deity, we should never be surprised or discouraged by our own struggles to truly understand the reality of the amazing miracles he worked. After all, as John so clearly relates, Christ own disciples didn't understand. Like us – they struggled with it all.

They were there, they saw the five loaves and two fish with their own eyes, they passed out the baskets full of food to the hungry crowd, they collected all of those leftovers, and still they subsequently questioned – and on occasions even denied Christ.

Unlike those disciples, We don't remember – we weren't there. We don't understand; and yet we believe (even with occasional doubts) we believe. But then we find ourselves surrounded by those who don't believe because they don't understand. They can't intellectually figure it out. They are somewhat like Mickey Mouse doubting the existence of Walt Disney because Mickey can't understand his creator.

I think the trap here for us is not to be found in their **un**belief, - I think the trap is that we probably spend entirely too much time and spiritual energy trying to justify our belief in the face of their criticism and doubt.

I think, there are times when we are called to defend the faith. However, we can get so caught up in defending the Gospel that we have little time left to proclaim it. And what are we really proclaiming when we positively declare the supernatural acts of this man Jesus?

In John's previous chapter, Jesus teaches, "Truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing on His own, but only what the father is doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise.

"Indeed, as the Father raises the dead and gives life, so also the Son gives life to whomever, He wishes." In so many words, Christ says, "My Father is in the business of giving eternal life in the midst of death, and I'm taking on the family business."

God is about life; therefore the miracles of Jesus are about life. The principle spiritual categories of our faith are not 'good vs evil', 'right or wrong' or even 'punishment and reward'. These concepts may be important, but the principle spiritual and/or biblical categories of Christianity are 'LIFE & DEATH'. And I think we need to understand eternal life as a background for all of Christ's miracles.

Jesus is not simply showing off his magic tricks here. Rather he uses miracles to reveal and celebrate life. To borrow from today's collect, He is revealing life that has moved through the temporal to the eternal. He is doing his will on earth as it is in heaven.

Jesus can do nothing on His own, He does only what he sees the Father doing – and what an absolutely incredible statement that is. What does He see His Father, the creator of life - doing? He sees God creating life, expanding life, restoring life, saving life, nurturing life, and yes - resurrecting life.

The story of the miracle of Christ feeding the multitude is all about life. Much of that same crowd followed Jesus around for days after they have been fed, and the bread is gone, but Jesus continues to use bread as a spiritual symbol.

He uses the loaves as a symbol of another kind of food. Jesus says, **“the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”** They said to Him, “Sir, give us this bread always.” Jesus answered, “I am the bread – I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

I am the bread of life, I am the resurrection and the life, I am the way, the truth and the life. It is the very nature of God to give life through bread. He becomes the bread and we feed on Him in our hearts through faith. You see, if he becomes the bread, then it really is more about life sustaining **faith**, than it is about some miraculous act in and of itself.

I wonder, which is the greater miracle?: the fact that 5,000 people didn't miss lunch on that particular day, or that more than 2,000 years later we all get up on Sunday morning and come to this place looking for a piece of bread?