

“Feeding Five Thousand, Walking on Water”

In the beginning of the gospel of John the beloved apostle tells us that the “light has shined into the darkness but the darkness has not understood it.” (Jn. 1:5)

Right there, in the very beginning of the story, John is giving us a crucial clue that will help us understand the rest of his story. If you do not get this then you will not understand his gospel.

Because the “light has shined into the darkness of this world” and because we “have not understood it,” whether we be followers of Christ or not, we are always be missing the point, the truth, and the reality of Jesus’ power to save us.

Because of the Darkness of Our Hearts We Are Slow to Get It

This fact explains why when Jesus said “destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days” that the crowds **and** the disciples thought he was talking about the impossible task of putting back together the rubble of the temple in Jerusalem that would be destroyed, as opposed to his power to bring forth his own bodily resurrection after his crucifixion. (Jn. 2:19-22)

It explains why when Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be “born again” that Nicodemus thought he was talking about the crazy idea of going back into the womb of his mother, and not his spiritual rebirth. (Jn. 3:1-15)

It explains why when Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well that he had “living water” that would quench her thirst that she thought he was talking about stagnant physical water deep in Jacob’s Well, as opposed to spiritual water that would quench her thirst for God.

Then there are the three miracles of John that we have encountered thus far in this gospel. There is the turning the water into wine at the wedding in Cana of Galilee (Jn. 2), the healing of the Royal Official’s son, who was close to death (Jn. 4), and the healing of the paraplegic who laid helplessly by the healing pool waiting for someone to pick him up and put him in the water. (Jn. 5)

Really, these aren’t clues. Clues are much more subtle. This is more like a big ol’ board that whacks us up side the head; yet in all of our ignorance we still don’t get it. These signs are obvious!

They are kind of like the “honey do” list that my wife left for me on the kitchen counter a few weeks ago. Hello! Earth to Scott, this is important to your wife, these things need to be done. Yet, somehow, I’ve missed it. I think I’ve only gotten to one of them. Why? Because the light of Malia has shined into the darkness of Scott and the darkness has not understood it!

The Failure of the Disciples in the Text

This reason explains to us why it is that in our two miracle stories today the disciples, the ones who were closest to Jesus, the ones who actually were given enough “grace light” to follow him, still don’t get it.

How is it that Jesus could have done all of this stuff that I have just recounted for you and the disciples still question his ability to feed the multitudes and rescue them from the storm?

Jesus tested Phillip and Phillip failed the test. “Where will we get this bread?” said Jesus. “I don’t know Lord,” said Phillip. “It would take eight months of a man’s salary to go to town and buy enough food for this crowd!” Andrew then pops up and says, “Lord, there is a little boy in the crowd who has five loaves and two fish, but that will only go so far!”

How is it that the disciples could respond in this kind of way, all the while knowing that Jesus has come through for people time and time again? How is it that they could hear his teaching about his ability to take away sins and make one forever right with God and not believe?

It kind of reminds of that story about the man who would ride his bicycle across the tightrope between two high rise buildings. You’ve probably seen the old black and white footage of that stunt before. He asks the crowd how many of you believe that I can ride across that wire with a man sitting on my shoulders. Everyone enthusiastically says, “Yes, we believe!” But when he asks for volunteers to ride on his back no one steps says a word.

Maybe that was the disciple’s problem. They believed that Jesus could save all those other people, but when it came to their own storms they could not muster up the faith to believe that Jesus could save them. I don’t doubt that. It’s easy for us to tell others that they need to trust in God when they are hungry, but when we’re faced with our own dilemmas we sometimes find our own faith slipping. But why is that? It’s because the light has shined into the darkness of our hearts but the darkness has not understood it.

Jesus’ Capacity to Feed and Rescue Us

Now where am I going with all of this?

I know that there are people in this place- mainly believers in Jesus Christ, but perhaps even a few who do not believe, for there are always people in the church who don’t- who are here today and who are having a hard that Jesus Christ can feed their “five thousand” or save them from their “storm.”

Today you readily identify with Phillip and like him, you find yourself flunking the test.

You also feel like those twelve disciples who are stuck in the boat. Even though Jesus has arrived on the scene time and time again in your life, this time you are “scared out of your skin” that you might drown.

Unlike the other gospels, John’s account does not give us the detail of Peter’s getting out of the boat and into the water, only to sink into the depths of the sea when he takes his eyes off of Christ, but that is what you feel like is happening to you.

Now for those who don’t feel that way this morning take good notes, mark this passage in your Bibles, and please forgive me for my diversion because the day is coming when you **will** feel this way. I know that because I know the darkness of the human heart and its innate tendency to **not** believe. The day is surly coming when you will feel like you are drowning in the storm, so now is the time to prepare yourself for it by clinging to this word.

The word is this: Jesus Christ is gracious to us even when our faith is weak and we are so slow to believe. That's one of the central truths to get in John's gospel. Christ gives us grace even though we are sinners. If our hearts were not "dark" then there would be no need to get his grace!

So here what we have in the text today is (1) the light of Christ "shining" into the desperate situation of the disciples lives; and we have (2) their failure to believe; and we have (3) the grace of Christ coming through for them AND rescuing them, in spite of the disciples failure to understand that Jesus can feed the multitudes and rescue them from their storm.

The scriptures tell us this morning that Christ multiplied the bread and fish, gave thanks to his Father, and fed the multitudes. There was even enough food left over to feed the twelve disciples! What Jesus had been doing for everybody else he would most certainly do for his disciples. (v.10-12)

The text also tells us that when Jesus came to the disciples in the midst of the storm that they were "terrified" to see him. They were terrified because they did not believe it was him! (If they did then why were they so terrified?) Even so, Jesus spoke peace to their situation. "It is I; don't be afraid." (v.20) It was only then that the "light of Christ" finally broke through their "darkness" and the disciples let Jesus onto the boat. Then they made it safely to the shore.

Application of the Text to the Christian Life

William Barclay, in his commentary on this text, provides a nice little insight on the progression of Jesus in these two miracles. I would like to share it with you.

He Sees

First, notice that Jesus is watching. His eye is always on the sparrow, as the old gospel hymn says.

In both of the miracles Jesus has need to be alone, away from the crowds, and away from those who would try to make him into a political king. He even has need to be away from his disciples. He needs quiet time with his Father. (How is your quiet time? Are spending time alone with the Lord in His Word, the Bible, and in prayer? If Jesus had need to do this then how much more so do we!)

Yet even though Jesus has this need to be alone, his eye is always on people. He sees their needs; he has compassion for them. Christ has come into the world to feed us all, body and soul; therefore the "good shepherd" sees us and is always ready to leave his place of solitude in order to come to us and rescue us from our storm, even if our faith is faltering. Jesus Christ has his eye on your life.

He Comes

This leads to the second point in the progression. Not only does Christ see us but he comes down to us. He is the incarnation of God, which is another great truth of John's gospel. To incarnate one's self means to leave the heavenlies and come to us in our world in human flesh. That's what Jesus did. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." (Jn. 1:14) Jesus left his heavenly grandeur and came down to this world in order to rescue us. Likewise, in the two

miracle stories Jesus comes down off the mountain, forsaking the wonderful view, and he comes to the hungry people and to the drowning disciples.

He Helps

After having seen the people and after having come down to them, the next thing Jesus does is he helps the people. That is the third point in the progression of Jesus' actions. He helps the people.

Perhaps you remember an old story that I think happened in New York City several years ago. A person was brutally robbed, beaten and murdered in a public park and there were people all over the place who saw it, perhaps even came to gather around from a distance, but that was it- they did nothing. There was no intervention. There was a story just like this a few days ago in Seattle. A teenage girl was beaten up by another girl and the security guards did nothing. They did not intervene.

The scriptures are telling us something quite different today. Jesus sees, he comes, **and** he helps.

Our Lord is desirous of taking action on our behalf and he will take action in our lives in order to help us in our hunger and our storms.

I love what the prophet Isaiah says.

Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have summoned you by name, you are mine.
When you pass through the waters
I will be with you;
And when you pass through the rivers,
they will not sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire,
you will not be burned;
the flames will not set you ablaze.
For I am the Lord your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.
-Is. 43:1-3

He Brings Us to the Safe Haven

The final progression in the movement of Jesus is that of him bringing us to a safe haven.

A "haven" is a place of refuge from the storm. It is a shelter. Jesus not only sees us, he not only comes to us, he not only helps us, but he also finishes the task for us. He gets us home to that safe place. He is our "shelter from the stormy blast" as it says in that great hymn, *Our God, Our Help in Ages Past*. Or as it says in *Amazing Grace*, Jesus is the "grace that will lead us home."

I exhort you to see this persevering grace- the grace that never quits, the grace that always gets the job done by getting us to the other side of the shore- in the text. John tells us that after Jesus got into the boat with his disciples they reached the other side of the shore. (v. 21)

When I think about the arrival of the disciples to their destination in this text I am reminded of the words of Jesus that he spoke to them about going to heaven in John 14.

- In my Father's house there are many mansions. If it were not true would I have told you so? But because it is true, I am going back to heaven to prepare a place for you. And if I go there to prepare a place for you, I will come again to take you where I am at also. (Jn. 14:2-3)

That is the promise of the gospel to you this morning. God will see his people through, all the way to the end.

Will there will be storms? Yes. Will there be pain, suffering, and loss in this life? Yes. The cross reminds us of this and we who are Christ's servants need to remember that we are **not** greater than the master. What I am saying this morning is not all hunky-dory, pie-in-the-sky stuff. But I am saying is that Jesus will get us to that safe haven, that place of refuge, rest, and peace. This we need to remember and this we need to believe.

The light of Christ has and is still shining into the darkness, even our own, but thanks be to God "the darkness has not overcome it."

Amen.