

Let us pray,

God, you are faithful, guiding us through your Word. Open us to your Spirit's presence, humble us in our listening, soften our certainty and stubborn wills, so that we might hear and receive the message you intend for us today.

Amen.

Our scripture for today comes from the Gospel of John, chapter 6, verses 1 through 21. Listen now for the word of the lord.

*After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. 2 A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. 3 Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. 4 Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. 5 When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?” 6 He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. 7 Philip answered him, “Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” 8 One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, 9 “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?” 10 Jesus said, “Make the people sit down.” Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. 11 Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. 12 When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, “Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.” 13 So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. 14 When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, “This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.” 15 When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself. 16 When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, 17 got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. 18 The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. 19 When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. 20 But he said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.” 21 Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.*

The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

One of my favorite TV shows is the office. It's a classic comedy show about the American workplace with ridiculous characters and situations - but also situations that really speak to the vulnerability of our lived experiences. One of the characters on the show is Andy Bernard.

He's quite a goofy and quirky character - he gets on your nerves quite often but he's so genuine and kind that you feel bad for him - but every once in a while, he speaks these surprisingly deep words of wisdom.

In one episode, he reflects on his college glory days when he was in an acapella group and had these close friends. He reflects on how he misses those days and relationships. And then he says this famous line - "I wish there was a way to know you're in the good ol' days before you've actually left them."

In the context of the episode and comedic structure - the line is meant to make you feel sorry for him - but it's also a deeply true sentiment we can all relate to.

How often do we reflect back to those special parts of our life (those we deem the glory days) and wish we could go back - this time knowing how special those times were.

It seems we're always looking back, realizing too late the magnitude of what was right in front of us.... even the disciples in our scripture today.

For in our scripture today, Jesus performs this great miracle, he feeds this great crowd with just five barley loaves and two fish - but our scripture tells us it's only after the miracle is over and the disciples are gathering the left overs that they realize the miracle that happened right before their eyes.

"So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. **14** When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, 'This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.'"

It wasn't until after.

It wasn't until after it was over that they realized what had happened. Now recognizing miracles - or really just miracles in general - is a bit of a confusing and tricky and somewhat uncomfortable topic in our post-enlightenment post-modern world we live in today.

In our world knowledge is power. And specifically knowledge we ourselves attain and understand and create - knowledges of science and technology and education - all wonderful things that have given us the opportunities and life we have today.

BUT the value we place, the power we place, on knowledge and explanations we can understand and develop...miracles don't really have a place in that.

Because we can't explain them. They're a knowledge we don't know.

In John's time, this was not the case. Miracles - or signs as John calls them - they were important.

John uses miracles to build a case that Jesus is the Christ - the logos - the word of God. and miracles are his evidence.

And in John's world - Jesus' world - this would have been normal. In the greco-roman culture - it would have been expected to use signs (or miracles) to prove divinity. To prove that a God really is a God.

Think back to Greek mythology and all of the miracles the Gods would perform.

Jesus must be Divine, he must be a God - if he can feed this great crowd with only 5 barley loaves and two fish and still have 12 baskets of food left over.

But in our time - we tend to try to explain miracles away. Even for this story - some modern scholars try to downplay or explain the miracle by saying that maybe the boy's willingness to offer up his only food encouraged other people in the crowd bring out their food as well to feed everyone.

But what do we lose when we do that?

Are we not trying to pigeonhole Christ into a Christ our knowledge can comprehend when we explain it away - thus we lose the wonder and awe of a Christ who really is miraculous?

When we do this - when we explain away Christ's miracles - we obscure what is truly miraculous in our lives - in our world.

We obscure the miracles we see day today.

One of the reasons I love to backpack - is because in a way I think it's miraculous.

I think it's kind of miraculous that you can carry all you need on your back - and just walk for days and days.

When you set up camp you have a tent and a sleeping bag and food and gear and you spread it all out and it's a lot of stuff - but then the next morning you take it all down and it all just fits right on your back. And you have a body with the capacity to carry it. Carry it for days while you walk mile after mile.

Miracles are all around us. We need only pay attention. And open our minds beyond the knowledge we have created. For when we pay attention - we see even the hidden miracles of Jesus feeding the great crowd.

As Douglas Hall explains, what is truly wonder-filled is that Jesus could represent, by his words and deeds, such a sign of hope and healing the hundreds of needy people would follow him about, and feel that their hunger for "the bread of life" had been assuaged.

Now, here I must make a distinction between the hidden miracles of our everyday life, the hidden miracles of the barley and fish and the miracles of God - Christ miracles, because the truth is, I have no idea how Jesus fed this great crowd.

But if I approach the story with wonder and awe - maybe I'll be able to see the miracles overflowing grace and endless hope hidden in the details of our world.

For was not the biggest miracle - the resurrection - hidden in the dawn - in the everyday miracle of the sun rising - and witnessed only by a weeping woman.

Don't be overwhelmed - or afraid to miss Christ miracles - those precious moments right in front of you - for once the disciples realized the miracle they witnessed but missed - they did not miss the next one.

The next miracle, Jesus walks on water - a miracle also found in the synoptic gospels.

But unlike the synoptics, the story in our scripture, in John, is told from the perspective of the disciples in the boat. And in the synoptics, the disciples don't recognize Jesus - they think he is a ghost walking on the water.

But in John's account - they immediately know it's Jesus and his miracle, for John writes it plainly in verse 19 - they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat.

They didn't miss it. And because John writes this story from the perspective of disciples in that boat - we're in that boat with them. And we won't miss it.

Our scripture states that the disciples, while they did recognize Jesus, they were afraid - but it was a fear struck with wonder and awe at this Christ the King. The majesty of who he is.

What will we finally see right in front of us, if we embrace this fear.. the fear of stepping out into the dark of the knowledge we cannot conceive - and instead gain the capacity to wonder.

Perhaps we'll see the miracle of Christ walking right to us in the storm. Walking on water just to get to us.

Let us learn from Andy - and see the good ol' days right in front of us.

Let us learn from the disciples - and see the miracles right in front of us.

For the wonder of Christ's miracles abide in our lives... and attune us to Christ's grace and hope hidden right here and now.

And for that.. thanks be to God. Amen.