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Weekly Letter – 6 August 2023

Matthew 14.13-21

Miracles

A slightly different reflection for this Sunday, in part because very rarely do we have the means to reflect on the evidence concerning Jesus' miracles.

People seem to be in roughly four camps. The first camp hold that Jesus performed miracles, and it is interesting to understand why they believe in his miracles. The second group won't actually say he did perform miracles, but instead say, "miracles are the creation of the early church expressing their faith in symbols". But, as far as I can see they don't say Jesus never performed miracles. The third group hold the line that they are not sure. Finally, the fourth camp say miracles have never happened because everything can be explained with a scientific explanation, i.e. based on empirical evidence. Of course you can ask what you mean by a miracle, but we'll leave that for another time!

I wonder, which group you would stand with?

To start the ball rolling, perhaps the first fact to state is that no serious historian would deny that Jesus was known during his life as a miracle worker. In fact, the historical evidence is rather surprising, as the best attested evidence about Jesus is that he was an exorcist and a healer. In other words, there are multiple sources, that clearly state Jesus performed miracles.

Part of the challenge for people today is that there is an extraordinary array of stunningly different miracles, for example, cursing of a fig-tree, healing of a blind man, walking on water, raising of the dead and telling an evil spirit to leave a man, which it does, and then enters a herd of pigs, and today's miracle, the feeding of thousands of people.

So, yes, the gospels are full of miracles but we also need to remember that still today verified miracles are happening, e.g. Lourdes. Furthermore, there is also quite an array of miracles being recorded, visitations from Mary, the mother of Jesus, healing miracles and prophecies.

Today's bible reading is in some ways not as puzzling as some suggest, because the multiple sources also show that Jesus had a habit of holding large joyful meals, and during these meals he explained that they were a foretaste of God's Kingdom here on earth. These huge gatherings and the miracles are two of the reasons that Jesus caused the authorities to focus their attention on him, and no doubt keep an eye on him. If this is true, then it is reasonable to suggest that if these miracles really weren't happening, then the authorities would have been fairly confident that Jesus would be seen as a fraud, and these large gatherings would end. As you know they didn't until he was in Jerusalem for his last few days.

I hope this material encourages you to take Jesus' miracles seriously and therefore to continue to find out more for yourselves about a man who caused a revolution in values, beliefs about God, and perhaps more than anyone else transformed the world we live in.

Stephen.

Sunday Morning Worship in Christ Well, and on Zoom at 10.30 am will be led by Miss Sue Raad.

Cycle of Prayer in the Swansea Region – Temple, Gowerton
Prayers for every household – we will pray for Pembroke Street

Tea and Chat – Tuesday, 8th August – Lunch in The Woodman

‘Food for us all’

(Lectionary Readings: Genesis 32.22-31 and Psalm 17.1-7, 15: Isaiah 55.1-5 and Psalm 145.8-9, 14-21: Romans 9.1-5: Matthew. 14.13-21)

God of compassion, God who understand and God of love,
we come.

God who heals the sick and the broken-hearted,
cares for the poor,
sets the oppressed free and releases the prisoners,
we come.

Please don't send us away hungry,
as we come to feed on your words.

We also come seeking forgiveness for the times
we forget to feed those on the margins, and those without a roof.
Your generosity is more than enough to go around
and your love for us all means there is enough
to feed the multitude and much more.

So, let us sit, wherever we may be, sharing the offering,
which was blessed, broken and given for us all.
Help us to show our thankfulness in thought, words and action.
May we set our minds on the truth, and to do justice
to the work and witness of those who have gone
ahead of us, in and through the name of Jesus.

Amen.

Anonymous (URC Prayer Handbook 2023)

