



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

Miracle The Ninth Sunday After Pentecost 7252021

Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and the Lord, our Savior, Christ Jesus. Amen.

Throughout my 19 years - almost 19 years of ordained ministry, I've gathered and collected a lot of books. Books that have helped me at times when I've been doing all kinds of ministry, but there's really been only one book besides the Bible, obviously, that I have used regularly all of those 19 years. And that book was edited by Burton Throckmorton Jr. I love that name. And he edited it and put it together in 1949 and it still exists today. And it's called *Gospel Parallels*.

And what it does is it takes Matthew, Mark, Luke, and lines them up and then compares the three different Gospels. And shows you where they line up, where there's stuff changed, and stuff omitted. And it's really quite very helpful because they all tell the stories, but in sometimes a slightly different way. And sometimes they don't tell the story at all. So, it helps me to figure out, well, does Matthew have this? Does Mark have it? Does Luke have it? And what does it look like?

And there are some interesting comparisons. So for instance that wonderful time when Jesus says to us, do not worry, do not worry because doesn't God take care and feed all the birds of the air? And if God does that for the birds, how much more will God do for you? Or if God takes time to clothe the lilies of the field in such splendor, how much more will the God who loves and cares for you do for you? Now that beautiful treasure from Jesus appears in Matthew and in Luke. But Mark doesn't seem to care about that. Mark likes to say, hey, y'all, Jesus is here. Hurry up, repent. The kingdom is coming near, so they have two different ways of looking at Jesus's ministry.

Now I love it when they all come together and tell the same story, because then you can really see the comparing and the contrasting. So there's a point where all three tell the story of the calling of the tax collector to become a disciple of Jesus, where Jesus goes up to the tax collector and says, follow me. And the tax collector leaves everything and follows Him. Well in the Gospel of Luke and the Gospel of Mark, that tax collector has a name. His name is Levi, but in Matthew, the tax collector's name is Matthew. So it's thought that the writer of the Gospel of Matthew was that tax collector who was called by Jesus himself to leave behind his old ways and follow Christ into new life.

And what's interesting is that in the Gospel of Matthew, there's one extra verse thrown in there that doesn't exist in the other two. And that verse is where Jesus looks at everyone who's grumbling because Jesus is having table fellowship with the tax collectors and the sinners. And he looks at all those grumbling righteous people and he says, go and learn what this means. I desire mercy, not sacrifice. And if anyone understood that it was Matthew the tax collector, who exploited people, who extorted people, and by the grace of God and the mercy of God became a disciple of Christ.

Do not worry little ones. I desire mercy, not sacrifice. These were such beautiful gems and neither of them appear in the Gospel of John. Did you notice in that *Gospel Parallels*, it was Matthew, Mark, and Luke, not John because John doesn't match with anything. John is some sort of rebel and he told the story in this very kind of strange different way. And there's so many things that are not in the Gospel of John. It's astonishing. There is no birth story in the Gospel of John. There is no baptism of Jesus in the Gospel of John. There is, believe it or not, no last supper with the institution of the Eucharist in John's gospel. Instead he has Jesus washing everybody's feet.

That's really fascinating to me to see what all four Gospels actually do share in common. Where do they harmonize? And as far as I can tell, there's about a half a dozen places. They all recount John, the Baptist, introducing Jesus. They all have Jesus being arrested in the Mount of Olives and the Garden of Gethsemane. They all have him going to trial. They all have him being crucified, dying and buried in a tomb. And all of them on Easter day have a woman or women who are the first people to discover the empty tomb.

And they have one more thing in common. They all tell the story of the feeding of the 5,000. Of all the miracles that Jesus did. That's the one that they chose to all tell. It's kind of a mundane miracle. I mean, it's just Jesus giving a single supper to a bunch of people who gathered. If you were going to choose a miracle that you would tell in your gospel, which one would it be?

My favorite is the one where there's the Gerasene Demoniac and he's like obsessed and possessed with a bunch of weird wild demons. And he's a crazy man and he runs around, he's buck naked. No shackles can hold him. He's a wild man with wild, crazy hair. And Jesus comes and says to the devils, be gone and the demons come out of him. They end up in a bunch of swine and the very next day, the man is fully clothed in his right mind and he's ready to walk into a corporate boardroom. I like that kind of transformation. I like that kind of miracle.

Or maybe you enjoy that fun, quirky miracle that Jesus does when He goes to a wedding and that the reception they run out of wine. So he makes, oh, I don't know, about 200 gallons of really good wine for everyone to enjoy so that nobody has to stop partying. Maybe your favorite miracle is when He goes to

see His friend who's been dead for three days. And He says, Lazarus, get up and the dead man is raised. And in that is all of our hope that God will raise all the dead to new life.

Nonetheless, it is the feeding of the 5,000 that each of the gospels preserved. It's a large crowd, even by today's standards. And they've all gathered around Jesus and Jesus decides no one's going to go home hungry. And this ain't no metaphor. This ain't no like I'm going to feed you with the bread of the word. This is like, I want them to have carbs and protein.

So it's interesting to see what all four stories preserve. They all have this interaction between Jesus and the disciples, where the disciples are beginning to learn once again, what it means to have God come in the flesh. And what do miracles really look like and how they push us to see things differently.

Now all the Gospels say that there's 5,000 men. In the Gospel of Matthew, he helpfully says there were women and children too, but we don't count them. I have to say, when we count attendance here at church, we count everybody, including the clergy. We're all people, we don't count dogs. But back then they only counted men.

And what was interesting was that all four of them say the men sat down on the grass. This isn't a fast food experience. This isn't like if you've ever been in a soup kitchen where you have people line up, so you can go through quickly and get the job done efficiently. Jesus had them sit down like fine diners so that they can speak to each other. And they would be served, making sure every single one of them had dignity.

All of them say that there were five loaves of bread, two fish. And how many baskets left over? Twelve. All of them. And I think this detail was preserved because it was trying to say that there were so many people that were fed with so little and there was a great abundance. And is that not the hallmark of God? For God to take nothing, make something and make it abundantly.

This is what we're learning about this God, Jesus does miracles. And this is what a miracle looks like. Jesus will care for you beyond your needs. Jesus will anticipate your concerns and provide for you more than you can imagine. Jesus will take care of you, just like he takes care of the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. No matter who you are, no matter what you have done or how much faith you have, Jesus Christ has come to show you mercy and care for you.

There are two things that matter to me about the feeding of the 5000. First, I believe that this is the reason that the church should absolutely be in the business of eradicating food insecurity. We are Christ's body in the world. We feed people with the bread of life. I witnessed this once at my home church way

back when 24 years ago in Durham, North Carolina, Christus Victor Lutheran church. It's a small church there.

And we didn't have a pastor. So I got up early on a Sunday morning and I was there to meet the supplied preacher to let him in and just show them the ropes and so on. And I got there and I was there and there was a man, a stranger who is sitting, waiting for church to open. So I welcomed him and quickly learned he did not speak any English and he quickly learned I did not speak any Spanish.

So there was that really awkward sense where you're trying to use your hands to explain everything and there's no communication happening whatsoever. So I did my best and as people came in for the service, I would welcome them, all these church members, and I'd say, oh, it's good to see you. Do you speak Spanish? And none of us did.

So this poor man came in and we just tried to help him because he came to church. So we gave him a bulletin, that was really dumb. But I had him sit right next to me and I was trying to just stipulate as we went through the service. And of course, all it really was, was me just kind of smiling at him and pointing. And so finally I pointed up to the altar rail as we all were going to get Communion.

Now at my home church, we would have members bake loaves of bread for Eucharist. So we always had a fresh loaf of bread to distribute for Communion. And I watched him as he kneeled down at the rail and the pastor handed him a big hunk of bread and as he drank the wine. I would find out later that that was his first meal that he'd had in two days.

So it turned out that we did end up having one Spanish speaker in the congregation. She came late to church. So after church, we immediately got her to talk to him. And I found out that he was traveling, which probably meant that he was illegally in the state, and he was going from here to there. Now, after Sundays after church, I was busy teaching Sunday school, but I could see the fellowship hall.

And I guess as soon as they all found that out, all of a sudden, all the members of the congregation ran into the kitchen and raided the kitchen and the fridge, brought it out, sat him down. He had a feast right there and they filled a bag full of things that he could take so that he had something to travel with on his way, he had some food. And he disappeared and we never ever saw him again. And that is what Jesus did for that man on that ordinary church Sunday day. He came down and he fed him and He took care of him. And as far as I'm concerned, that is the same miracle He did with the feeding of the 5000.

I am so happy that our church home is committed to feeding people in all kinds of ways. Last week, we went down to First Baptist institutional church. There was a whole mess of youth that were there and some adults, and we filled 100

people's trunks with food that they need to be able to sustain themselves. And that was Jesus feeding all of us and continuing the amazing miracle. Next month in August, we're planning to go down to the soup kitchen in Detroit, and we're going to make Chef Robert Carrigan's favorite and famous sloppy Joe's from scratch, and anyone who wants a meal will have it.

Then we're going to start at Baldwin Center in Pontiac. We're going to have a sandwich ministry and give them sandwiches on Saturday. And then at the end of September, we're going to have you provide meals for everyone who's hoteling still in the emergency shelter at Lighthouse and SOS. This ministry of feeding all is the miracle that's being perpetuated by Christ with His disciples to this day. Our God is in the business of giving all of us daily bread, and it is such a privilege to partake in this. May you always feed anyone who is hungry and continue to participate in that perpetual miracle until Jesus gathers us all together for that final heavenly banquet.

The other thing - you thought I was done didn't you? I'm not, I got one more thing. All right. So the other thing, the other thing that I get from this ubiquitous gospel story that shows up in all four Gospels is that Christ is in the business of making miracles happen. That's what God does. Exponential growth out of nothing. Mercy out of nowhere. I want you to never forget that your God does miracles always and regularly. How can you remind yourself of this? As you go through your week, encountering disappointment, bad news, dealing with difficult circumstances, how can you remember that God came, sat a hungry crowd down, and with practically nothing made the miraculous happen?

There was a man who I knew who witnessed to this almost every day. Another North Carolinian, his name was Rodney. He was at one of the churches I was in, in my Christian journey, and he was a character. He was very extroverted. He was kind of that in your face person who kind of attacked you as soon as you saw him. And the first time I entered into this church, he came straight up to me and he said to me, you are a miracle. And I thought he was hitting on me, and I was like, ugh, and then he said it to the guy right behind me, you are a miracle.

There's something that happens to you when you're reminded of that every day. And I have to say week after week, having Rodney come up to you and say you are a miracle. It takes a toll on you. Can you imagine? It reminds you that there's a Savior running loose in this world who is doing miracles literally right under your nose. It convinces you that God is at work in ways that we can perceive. And there are miracles that are happening all around us that we're ignoring and we're not paying any attention to. And it stretches you.

If miracles are found in the mundane, if miracles are found in the fact that you and I are just alive, well, then what does that mean about the whole world around us and everything in it? And what does it mean about the God who made it all, sustains it all, and gives it all away? We have this God who's in the

business of making miracles regularly, consistently, and always. Are you seeing it? Are you witnessing it? What's it doing to you? I think this is why Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John preserved this ordinary miracle of simply feeding people because when people are fed, you can count on the fact that there's an extraordinary God in the midst.

So disciples of Jesus, I want you to practice this this week. I want you to behold all the miracles that are surrounding you. Maybe we can start today, maybe during the peace, you can look at your neighbor and say, you are a miracle, maybe during the fellowship hour, you can say it. Maybe when you go out into the world and everyone you see this week, you can say to them, you are a miracle, or you can just open your eyes and look around and say, this is a miracle and see what you see clearly. And when you say that, then I want you to believe it.