

Do You Believe in Miracles?

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Mark 6:30-44

Sermons Series:
In Christ Together
for the World

***“Do you
believe in
Miracles?”***

Later this month, on February 22, America will commemorate the 30th anniversary of the “Miracle on Ice.” *Sports Illustrated* has called it the greatest sporting event of the 20th century.

Let me take you back 30 years. Nineteen hundred and eighty was still the Cold War era between the United States and the Soviet Union. In the Winter Olympics held in Lake Placid, NY, the American ice hockey team, comprised exclusively of amateurs and collegiate players, faced a formidable Soviet team. Not only was this professional Russian team seated first, but they had thoroughly dominated the previous four Olympics. One sportscaster from the New York Times wrote that unless the ice melted or the U.S. team performed a miracle, the Russians were expected to win handily. In an exhibition game a few days before the Olympics the Soviets crushed the U.S. 10-3.

The Soviet and American teams advanced to play each other in the medal round. The Soviets entered the third period up by a goal, but the Americans scored the equalizer. Then, Mike Eruzione’s slap shot

found the back of the net, putting the U.S. up by a goal with 10 minutes remaining.

Al Michael of ABC sports counts down the final seconds. When the U.S. team cleared the puck in the waning seconds, Michaels shouted the immortal words, “Do you believe in Miracles?” He answered with a definitive, “Yes!” His words are forever etched in my memory. Incidentally, the U.S. team defeated Finland two days later to secure the gold medal.

Do you believe in miracles? I do. I’ve never witnessed a miracle along the lines of the one I read a few moments ago. Yet, I trust the Biblical account to be true about the miracles Jesus performed. I’m confident that the God who created the world *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) is able to feed 5000 people with someone’s lunch. But since miracles of this magnitude are outside the realm of our experience, they seem so long ago and far away.

I hope and pray this miracle comes alive today in your hearing. It’s the only one of Jesus’ miracles to appear in all four gospels. This miracle serves to substantiate Jesus’ identity, mission and call.

Earlier in Mark 6, Jesus sends his disciples out in pairs to

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preach the gospel and cast out demons (6:30). They return, in the opening verses of our Scripture lesson, to report to Jesus everything they have done and taught.

Jesus recognizes the weariness of his disciples and invites them to come away and rest awhile. But a growing crowd along the shoreline has other ideas in mind. Jesus' popularity has been surging lately. This miracle worker has created quite a sensation. By the time Jesus and his disciples reach their destination, the crowd has grown to 5000 men (6:44). Only heads of households were included in the count in those days. If you add women and children to the mix, the crowd could number 20,000 or more.

We're not told how Jesus' disciples handle the intrusion. But, given the fact that they are already tired and hungry, it's a safe bet they're in a foul mood.

Mark records Jesus' response. He surveys the large crowd and "has compassion on them because they seem like sheep without a shepherd" (6:34). Jesus seizes the moment to teach people. Hours later, they are still listening. Mark tells us elsewhere that no one ever taught with such authority (1:22).

The disciples then take it upon themselves to remind Jesus that the hour is becoming late. Why doesn't Jesus finish his sermon so the people can order carry-out in neighboring towns?

Jesus' reaction is abrupt and emphatic: "You give them something to eat" (6:37). Some of them quickly do the math in their heads. "It would take eight months worth of wages to feed so many people."

"How many loaves do you have?" Jesus asks (6:38). The disciples quickly canvas the crowd. The tally is five loaves and two fish. John supplies the detail that the five barley loaves and two pickled fish belong to a boy in the crowd (6:9).

Jesus directs his disciples to arrange the crowd into dinner groups. "Jesus takes the bread and the fish...blesses it, breaks it and gives it to his disciples..." (6:41). These four verbs, take, bless, break and give, appear in the same order later in Mark when Jesus shares the last supper with his disciples (14:22-23). There is something almost sacramental about the way Jesus provides for people's bodies and souls.

While the disciples distribute the meal, the crowd seems oblivious to where they get the fish and chips. This miracle is intended for Jesus' 12 disciples. Everyone eats his fill and is satisfied. They not only have enough; they have more than enough. The disciples collect 12 baskets of leftovers; one for each disciple. Twelve is a curious number, given that there are 12 tribes in Israel.

We're asking three questions during this four-month sermon series on Mark's

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gospel. Who is Jesus? Why did he come? What is our response? Let's take each question in order. First, who is Jesus?

Some people propose a natural explanation for this miracle. Perhaps the generosity of this boy in sharing his lunch inspires everybody to open his picnic basket and share the fried chicken and potato salad with his neighbors. But there's nothing in the text to suggest such a fanciful inter-pretation. We're not told how Jesus performs the miracle. All we're told is that he does it.

Jesus' miracles predominate in Mark 4-6. In chapter 4, Jesus calms a raging storm at sea. In chapter 5, he casts out demons from a man, heals a woman of chronic bleeding and raises a girl from the dead. In chapter 6, Jesus walks on water.

The gospels call Jesus' miracles "signs" to reveal his identity. Who is Jesus? Mark has told us in earlier chapters he is the Son of God, Son of Man, Lord, Teacher, Messiah, Lord of the Sabbath and Son of the Most High God.

Our second question concerns Jesus' mission. Why did he come? There are actually two banquets in Mark 6. Jesus' feeding of the 5000 in verses 30-44 is juxtaposed to Herod's macabre banquet in verses 14-29. Herod hosts an eloquent banquet in his palace for all the movers and shakers, while Jesus caters an impromptu picnic out in the open air for the

masses. Herod's banquet results in John the Baptist's death while Jesus' banquet issues in life for people.

When Jesus sees the crowd, he reacts with compassion. Compassion could be called Jesus' signature act, the hallmark of his ministry. Jesus shows compassion to people. Jesus shows people compassion because they seem like sheep without a shepherd. Perhaps, as Jesus sees the white-robed people gathering on the green grass, they look like hungry, bleating sheep.

The prophet Isaiah likens us to sheep that have gone astray (53:6). It's not a compliment to be called sheep. I'm sorry to disappoint you, but sheep are rather dumb. Sheep are forever getting lost in the Bible. They tend to wander into unsafe territory in search of fresh pasture.

How do we go astray? Like sheep, we nibble our way into danger, a little at a time. Fortunately, God provides us with a Good Shepherd who "makes us to lie down in green pastures and leads us beside still waters" (Psalm 23:2).

So what is our response? So what difference does this miracle make in my life?

We give Jesus what we have, nothing more and nothing less. You may not feel like you have much to give Jesus. So! Neither do the people in our story. The only food resource among 5000+ people is a boy with his lunch.

***Jesus can do
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The scarcity of resources is prominently on display here. All four gospels make a point of mentioning the five loaves and two fish. Time and again, Jesus can do a lot with a little. If Jesus can take some kid's lunch and feed 5000 people with it, surely he can multiply our meager resources. The point of the story is not the scant resources, it's what Jesus can do with what people give him.

What can Jesus do with what we have? In the ministry of Great Banquet, we pose three questions to our guests in a talk given on priorities. How do you spend your time? How do you spend your money? What do you think about?

How *do* you spend your time? I challenge you to offer your time to the Lord this week. Who are the people God wants you to care for? What are the projects worth your investment? Make these concerns a matter of prayer this week. As you pray, pay close attention to the people God brings into your awareness. Maybe there are people coming into view right now to whom you need to apologize, extend mercy or show care.

How *do* you spend your money? I challenge you to invest your money in the Lord's work this week through this church or a Christian mission of some kind. The prophet Malachi invites us to

present our tithes and offerings to the Lord (3:8). Tithe is a word meaning tenth. For some, giving a tenth of our income to the Lord's work is a stretch. Let God stretch you in your giving. Malachi writes, "Bring the full tithe into the storehouse... put me to the test says the Lord of Hosts; see if I will not throw open the windows of heaven and pour down so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it" (3:10). I didn't make up this verse. It's on page 890 of your pew Bibles.

What *do* you think about? I challenge you to pick up our devotional and join us in reading Mark 7 this week. You can also access it online at viennpres.org/devotionals. Meditating on Scripture is one sure way to counteract the crazy making that clouds our thinking. AA calls it "stinkin' thinkin'," whenever we revert to negative thoughts and destructive attitudes. Ralph Waldo Emerson writes, "We are what we think about all day long." The King James Version of Proverbs 23.7 says it best: "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he." We are what we think about.