

DESERT MIRACLES
Matthew 14:13-21
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LISTEN: <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/desert-miracles/>

When in Israel last February, we visited the possible site of the feeding of the thousands. Whether or not it was the exact spot, it was breathtaking to think Jesus might have been on this very hillside, teaching, feeding and blessing. This is the only miracle of Jesus which is in all four gospels, so it must be important.

One of the first things I notice in this story is the contrast between the disciples' lack of imagination and Jesus' power to believe that something God-sized could break in. This is often my story, how about you? I live with WHAT IS while Jesus wants to take me to WHAT COULD BE. Who here this morning could use a miracle in your life? And aren't miracles all around us every day? It was C.S. Lewis along with several others who reminded us that miracles are God's providential care simply compressed and concentrated into a shorter time frame. The feeding of five thousand occurs all the time, but usually with a wheat drill, tractor, a combine and a railroad. Or one of my favorite: only God could cause a black cow to eat green grass and yield white milk! Physical healings occur regularly, only with the miracle drugs and surgery.

In the same way, every meal is a miracle. Where did all this food come from? In Jewish tradition, every meal is a sacred meal. All meals are miracles of God's provision.

And let's face it. The last place we ever expect God to work is in a deserted area, where there is nothing. But those are God's perfect conditions! When Matthew says in v. 20 that "they ate and were filled," he is using the same word in Matthew 5:6 ("blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be satisfied"). At the Lord's Supper, we experience a world in which God's blessings are plentiful, more than enough. In the bread and cup, we get to re-live plenty of forgiveness, powerful new birth, God's rescue from an empty, hungry heart that was never satisfied.

What's more, at the Table, we experience the Christ who cared about every dimension of life, about satisfying all our needs, and cares about the hungry, the homeless and the cast-aside.

And that leads us to another miracle which took place that day on the hillside. Has it ever occurred to you that Jesus could have fed the 5000 all by himself? He didn't really need all the helpers, passing out the food. But specifically, he involves his followers, gives them a role in the miracle. Now get this. In mimicking Jesus (doing what he did, feeding people), the disciples discover their own hearts of compassion. Think about it. You didn't say, "I love people in Knoxville, so I want to go on the youth mission trip." It was the other way around. "I went on the trip and I grew to love those people so much!" The same with Ukraine, Kenya, South Dakota and Jefferson City and your own Sunday school class.

And remember. The miracle keeps going. They had twelve baskets left over (another miracle). Verse 20 says they had twelve baskets "left over and above" (the same Greek word in John

10:10, used for “abundant life.” Abundant life comes when go into the miracle business with God.

While on vacation this summer, Janet and I spent a Saturday morning, walking the square in a small town. It was a farmer’s market, craft fair and talent show all rolled into one. And it was lively! I think I figured out its success when I saw a sign from The Merchant Association and Chamber of Commerce which read, “We need your imagination. We need your commitment.”

Who here this morning needs a miracle? Who here this morning needs to stop living the merely horizontal life and needs to be open to God’s vertical dimension, the inbreaking of God’s nourishing supernatural?