



WEEKLY STUDY March 5 – March 11, 2023

(Use this guide to individually or with a group dive deeper into this week's sermon.)

Our sermon series for Lent is: "Made For a Miracle"

On Ash Wednesday we began our new sermon series: Made for a miracle. As we journey to the cross with Jesus this Lent, we will be examining the miracles in the book of John. Each one offers us an invitation to conversion: from emptiness to overflow; from holding on to letting go; from fear to courage; from spiritual blindness to depth of sight; from death to life. We are encouraged to make the season of Lent a meaningful one through practices that enrich our spiritual life and increase our missional outreach to family, church, and community.

Our scripture this week is John 6:1-15 (NRSV)

"After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberius. A large crowd kept following him because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. 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?' He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, 'Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.' One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, 'There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?' Jesus said, 'Make the people sit down.' Now there was a great deal of grace in the place, so they sat down, about five thousand in all. 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. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, 'Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.' So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. 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.' 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."

- 1)** Our scripture this week recounts the miracle (called sign in the Gospel of John) of the feeding of 5000 men (not counting women and children). Pastor Sam told us that this is the only miracle included in all 4 Gospels. Chronologically, the gospel of Mark (written 66-70) is the oldest gospel and Matthew and Luke (both written 70-80) both draw

heavily from Mark. John (written 90-110) has many differences from the first three (called the synoptic gospels). Stop and read the feeding of the 5000 from the other three gospels, as well as re-reading our scripture from Sunday. (Matthew 14:1-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17). John is the only gospel containing the story of the boy having the 5 loaves and 2 fish. Pastor Sam reminded us that, for the writer of John, each sign reveals who Jesus is; points to kingdom character; and creates faith.

Question: Which version do you prefer? Do you sense differences in the gospel accounts that better help you understand who Jesus is? Clarify the behaviors that reflect the kingdom of God? Create faith?

- 2) Let's look more closely at the action of the boy. He is willing to give up his 5 loaves and 2 fish to share with those gathered around Jesus. Pastor Sam told us one interpretation of this miracle is that after the boy shared, everyone started sharing what they had tucked into their bags. Instead of hoarding and keeping what they had, the generosity of this boy helped others share their resources. She said the boy created a ripple effect. Sharing begets sharing. Hospitality begets hospitality. There is something very human about looking and seeing the action of another and joining in. We saw it happen in our own community recently when the girl who was attending a volleyball match was randomly hit by a car and had both legs amputated. There has been an outpouring of love and care and money for her support. We are also reminded that hate begets hate. Violence begets violence. People join in and the result is a mob. We have a choice of which group we will chose.

Question: When in your life have you motivated others to join in with acts of generosity and hospitality? When have you witnessed the power of the group to sway behavior either in a positive or a negative way?

- 3) I love bread. Fresh baked bread is a delight for me – the smell; the feel; the taste; the way it fills me. And I love the importance bread plays in our faith. To share bread with one another links us in community. Sunday's worship table gave us the visual of beautiful fresh baked loaves of bread. Amy-Jill Levine in her book, *Signs and Wonders: A Beginner's Guide to the Miracles of Jesus*, subtitled this miracle, "The Centrality of Bread." Last year at lent, we spent each week examining the phrases in the Lord's Prayer and completed, "Give us this day our daily bread." This year we hear through the miracle reminders of the centrality of bread throughout scripture. Pastor Sam reminded us that during the Exodus God provided the sustenance the Hebrew people needed through manna and quail. She then said, "In John 6:48-51, when people are confused about Jesus' miraculous work, He tells them, 'I am the bread of life.' Jesus is the bread that is both daily sustenance and never-ending sustenance for abundant life.

Question: Can you recall others miracles of feeding in the scripture? What does it mean for you when Jesus says, "I am the bread of life?"

- 4) The title for this Sunday's sermon was, "The Miracle of Letting Go". Pastor Sam reminded us we are invited to stop our holding on and move to letting go. We often are holding on to an abundance for ourselves because we live in fear of scarcity. The

message is scripture is one of learning to rely on God, to share in our resources, to separate what we need from what we want. Pastor Sam ended the sermon with an invitation to let go and let God. Going back to the Exodus story, with thanks to JB for her playing and Josh for his singing, in the 8:30 service we heard the song, "Honey in the Rock" by Brooke Ligertwood. The lyrics were a good reminder of this message. This song may be familiar to you. Here are words to the chorus:

"There's honey in the rock. Water in the stone. Manna on the ground. No matter where I go. I don't need to worry now that I know. Everything I need you've got. There's honey in the rock." The imagery reminds us that miracles reside in the ordinary things of life.

Question: What miracles have you noticed surrounding you in the past week through the ordinary events of life?

Prayer: (Our prayer this week is the Affirmation of Faith from Sunday's service.)

"O God of miracles, who has what we need for this very moment, and with whom we work alongside to bring about goodness in this life, move us to share what we have and to receive that which is shared. May we wait in expectation, prepare with humility, and welcome the miraculous as it comes. AMEN"

Weekly Challenge: This Sunday was the second Sunday in Lent. (Remember – every Sunday is a feast day because that was the day Jesus was resurrected.) Lent is the time to deepen our faith; to spend time listening for God's guidance; to give witness in our actions and practices to our faith. This week, generously to a food project – to "Salt & Light Food Pantry"- where you can drop off canned goods from 11-2 this Wednesday, March 8, or to another food project for those in need in the community.

(Weekly study guide prepared by Rev. MaryJane Pierce Norton)