



Pastor Chris Marien
Matthew 14:13-21

Sunday, August 2, 2020

Reflection: Teamwork

A first-grade teacher seated her students in a circle. She asked them what they wanted to be when they grew up. One by one, each child got up and announced, "I'd like to be a nurse like my mother," or "I want to be a banker like my father," or "I want to be a teacher like you, Miss Smith." The last child to speak was the most shy and timid little boy in the class. He said, "When I get big, I'm going to be a lion tamer in the circus. I'm going to face those animals with my whip and chair and make them leap through hoops of fire and obey all of my commands." Seeing the disbelieving looks on the faces of his classmates that he could ever act so boldly or bravely, he was quick to reassure them, "Well, of course, I'll have my mother with me."

Is it not true for you and me at times...that things seem to be easier when we are in a crowd and not simply alone in the world? Even one other person, in the midst of sticky situation, gives me strength, courage, confidence. Often times, it is my wife—sometimes it is the dog. Ileen, always the one to push me ahead when she thinks I may be too passive—I was not always that way—but marriage—ministry can change you into a more patient person. And of course the dog. A couple of weeks ago while Ileen and I were sleeping, Baxter let out a low and loud bark. We both woke up, and before we could speak, Baxter was up and barking.

Well, now my interest was piqued and as I got out of bed—I walked into the hallway and found Baxter standing at the top of the stairs looking into the darkness and growling. How proud I was that this dog was so protective of his family. How quickly my pride turned to despair when I realized that the dog was not going down the stairs until I went down first. And as I looked at him—he seemed to be saying with his eyes—you go first—I'll back you up! Thanks a lot. But still—I was not alone—at least there was Baxter—Ileen just rolled over and went back to sleep. Next time I am sending my wife down the stairs. #teameffort #Iamrightbehindyou. Team effort – not so much.

The feeding of the five thousand—is one of those great moments when the power of God literally flows from the very hands of Jesus. That the wonder of such miracles is offered to you and me is nothing short of inconceivable. In the midst of the pandemic, I had higher hopes that people might have been willing to set more time aside to listen for God's voice. It seems to be that much of the world has quit listening altogether. And guess what, you and I are the ones God is calling to let the world know that the miraculous still happens—that God is still working—that the power of forgiveness and the promise of eternal life are as overwhelming to those who find faith alive in their bodies and souls for the first time as was the full stomach of peasants who surrounded Jesus in the moment of this feeding of the five thousand.

Author Halford Luccock in his book, "Like a Mighty Army," writes: The worst enemies of vital Christianity are those who have tried to regularize it, to take out its fantastic, peculiar qualities and leave it no different from anything else. Jesus feeds five thousand men, twelve disciples and at least as many women and children. It is a wondrous event. Nothing short of miraculous. So great is the showing of God's power in Jesus Christ, that all four gospel writers have need to take note and remember the story in their testaments of their Savior Jesus Christ for all the world.

We do not want Jesus to be lost—one voice among the many in the world. And I do not believe that Jesus is in any danger of being forgotten.

The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever. (Isaiah 40:8)

My greater fear is that God in Jesus Christ will continue to be taken for granted. God will always be there. I'll worry about my faith; my salvation, eternal life later. And it is not God who suffers but you and I who suffer in this world when we do not let God be a part of the crowd we walk with—and hold on to.

Lutheran pastor Armin Gessweing, writes, “When God is about to do something great, God starts with a difficulty. When God is about to do something truly magnificent, God starts with an impossibility.”

Feeding more than five thousand with five loaves and two fish—impossible to my mind, to my eyes—but not to my faith. Ascension gathering for worship during a pandemic, calling a pastor, interviewing for a new Director of Youth Ministries—impossible only in my lack of faith—but to my dreams—to our God—in our wildest hopes—an absolute definite of course it will happen kind of miracle for us to ponder in the days ahead.

If you still struggle to believe God’s power, ask Tony next Sunday about being a full-time father and husband, Director of Faith Formation, and a full-time seminary student over the last four years. Ask Tony to tell you of the impossibility of moving towards his ordination as a pastor after more than 20 years of running from God. Nothing, my friends, absolutely nothing, is impossible for God.

What are the impossibilities in your life? What crowds do you have to feed? What battles lay before you? What giants to you have to face?

When faced with the impossibilities of life, face them hand-in-hand with the one who makes all things possible. Read God’s word; kneel before God in prayer; seek God’s will for your life. Then let God lead you where God would have you go and trust that God goes before you and beside you all along the way. To the great glory of God. Amen.