

Jesus takes the common and everyday parts of our life, the basic necessities for survival across time, space, and culture, and transforms them into the place of miracles.

In John's gospel, like in the story we read today, miracles are usually referred to as "signs". Miracles are signs from God that God is working in our world, and indeed give us a glimpse of the kingdom of heaven. Signs come about using common, everyday objects and situations to reveal God's nature and Jesus' presence in the world.

God comes to us in these everyday situations, oftentimes when we feel like we're just going through the motions to survive and yet in that everyday, familiar, common place, God is revealed. God does not always need the grand gestures and spectacular sights, but simply meeting us in our everyday life, actions, objects, and nourishing, is when God does some of the most powerful work.

Our sacraments, the holiest rituals and reminders of God's presence, are rooted in these everyday nourishments - two of which we hear about in today's Gospel reading - bread and water. Communion and baptism. Miracles and signs. Human and divine.

Of course, the two stories we heard today are two of what we could call Jesus' "greatest hits" - feeding the five thousand (or more), and walking on the water. Two signs that seemed impossible given the very real limitations put on them by our humanness, and yet with his divinity, Jesus not only met the people where they were, hungry and terrified, but also showed them God was with them, among them, and guided them to what they needed. Through Jesus Christ, God showed he was the father who would provide for his beloved children, through their needs of food, nourishment, comfort, and as much safety as he was able to provide.

In this particular telling of these two stories, we learn more details about what life with and around Jesus was like, and just how much of an impact these miracles had on the crowds and on the disciples. We learn in this

telling of the feeding of the five thousand that the bread used to feed all those people were barley loaves. Barley loaves were a common staple food for the poorer folks of that time, the sort of hearty but not as expensive or complicated type of food that can feed a crowd without as much work or fuss. These were sturdy, fuel your body kinds of loaves, familiar to the crowds of people gathered. The fish they had was also common, a kind of dried fish, another practical food meant for the sake of satiating real hunger with real, hearty food. The leftovers are important too - not only were these people truly fed with filling food, but they had enough to eat their fill and to take with them, and it wouldn't spoil on their journey back home either. Seeing Jesus filled them with not only food for the day, but also food for their spirits - they knew he had great and God-given power as they began to proclaim Jesus as king. Truly only the one who was promised by God could have done such a powerful, miraculous thing.

And while Jesus gave thanks for this ability to truly feed the people gathered near to him, he also knew that their knowledge of his divine power could turn dangerous very quickly. In wanting to crown Jesus king, the people would draw even more attention to him from the Roman authorities, who did not like having their authority questioned in any way. So Jesus quickly removed himself from the situation, away from the present danger, to a deserted place where he could pray and catch his breath and have a bit of alone time to himself. A very real, human series of actions that we can certainly understand. The word that's translated as "withdrew" in this text could also be translated as "fled" from the crowd, which perhaps paints a more accurate picture of what really happened. Jesus' disciples also knew that this level of attention and adoration could be dangerous, so they too fled the scene, but they went in the opposite direction, towards the water and their boat, to sail away from the persistent and grateful crowd.

The disciples were already a bit afraid and hyped up while moving away from the crowd, so when the storm came and their boat started blowing around with the strong winds, they became exponentially more afraid. From how many different directions and in how many ways were they to fear for

their lives in a single day? How many kinds of terror were they going to have to face?

Jesus met them in the heart of their fear, the heart of the storm as well as their hearts filled with terror, and assured them “do not be afraid. It is I, your friend, your leader, Jesus. It’s okay, I am here with you. Not even this storm is going to take me down, dear friends. I’ve got you, and I am right here with you.”

Jesus made sure they got where they needed to go safely and in peace. In the midst of an uncontrollable and insurmountable disaster, Jesus met them with peace and kindness and guidance and holy, miraculous presence and indeed the disciples made it through.

Maybe the uncontrollable and insurmountable disasters and fears we face are not our boat being sunk by a heavy storm, but as this last year taught us, we never really know what kind of disasters or fearful situations we might face. That might change our lives drastically from what we knew or thought was coming. That give us very real reasons to be afraid.

But in the midst of our very human fear, in the very heart of it, Jesus meets us. Jesus calms us and gives us direction and truly his voice can be heard even in the darkest and scariest of times. Jesus is the light that shines in the darkness and the darkness will not overcome it. Jesus is the good shepherd who meets the needs of his sheep and guides them to where they can live safely and in peace. Jesus is the Savior of the world who died on the cross not out of defeat but indeed to defeat the powers of sin and death that threaten to keep us from our God of love and life, who gives us new life each and every day. Jesus, our friend, our Messiah, our leader, shepherd, and Savior meets us where we are, just as we are, and indeed guides us into new and abundant and beloved life. Always.

The inherent humanness in the locations of signs and miracles helps us to know the humanness of Christ in a way that I pray, dear friends, is life-giving and even life-saving to you. Jesus truly knows what it is to be human, even our deepest and most desperate needs and desires. I pray that you may encounter Christ in your day to day interactions and objects,

in the things you need to keep yourself alive. I pray that in the daily tending of your body, mind, and spirit, that you feel the goodness, the love, and the nourishing power of Jesus, who walks alongside us in love, has the power to cast out even our greatest fear, and indeed knows us and ensures we are never alone. Jesus will never abandon you, and you can feel his powerful presence and his great love in the sacraments and the staples of life. Thanks be to God, for our Savior Jesus Christ, the human and divine beloved Son, who gives us life and love each and every day. Amen.