

Two, three or more miracles? - Revd Dallas Ayling

Today we have two miracles contained in our reading or perhaps there are three. The feeding of the 5,000 + (don't forget the women and children weren't counted) and then Jesus walking on water. I think that counts as a miracle too, don't you? The third miracle I will mention in a moment.

Think for a moment: Out of the two stories which is the one you are most comfortable with? And then, which is the most challenging story for you?

Jesus had withdrawn by himself to a mountain after the picnic, and the disciples decided to take the boat, so at that point they weren't together. Jesus catches up with them. What is interesting to note is that no one seemed to be afraid of the fact that Jesus could feed so many people and yet the disciples were afraid, when they saw Jesus, walking on the water. It doesn't say that they were afraid of the wind, or they were afraid of the waves, it says in v.19, "When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were frightened." Why do we think that they were afraid? Jesus walking on the water really seemed to worry the disciples. Perhaps, it has something to do with the fact that those at the big picnic wanted to make Jesus king, which was not what he wanted, but then he does something in front of his disciples which shows

his kingship over creation. Is this not confusing for them? The challenge of continuing to learn more about who Jesus just might be. Perhaps, the disciples were chewing over the events of the day, themselves challenged by not just what they had seen, but actually being part of the feeding of all those people. Imagine what it might feel like handing out food and it comes, and it comes, and there is even enough left over to fill 12 baskets. Would you not have a question mark over your head about what Jesus had just done? Perhaps they were discussing the fact that it was already a miracle that this little boy had been willing to share his picnic. Well, it was a miracle, wasn't it? A young child giving up his food. Now I personally think that this was a clever young man because no one else had thought about how they were going to feed themselves, but this little boy did. I imagine a conversation between him and his mum. "Mum, Mum I've heard that Jesus is around here somewhere. Can I go and find him?" To get him out from under her feet she allows him to go and packs him a picnic – because she knows that children get hungry. And off he goes to find Jesus and he does. This story always reminds me of my daughter when she was a little girl. Whenever we were going out in the car, she wanted to know how long we would be, because if she thought that sounded a long time then she needed to make sure that she had a snack with her and negotiations on this subject would then have

to take place. What do you think you would have done? Would you have given up your picnic? That's a difficult question isn't it? Don't forget that he didn't know what was going to happen to it. That little boy gave what he had to the disciples and because of his willingness to do so another extraordinary thing happened. Now some people try and explain this miracle away such as once the little boy gave up his picnic, so others began to do the same. But that is not what the story says. Some people will think the whole thing is made up anyway.

There is something about this miracle which John uses to point us to a connection with Communion – the blessing and breaking of bread – and the distribution of it – the sharing of it. Blessed, broken and generously given so perhaps it met a spiritual need but there was a practical purpose of meeting a physical need. The people were hungry, they were fed and they “ate as much as they wanted”. What a tale that young man had to tell when he got home. Do you think his mum believed him? Maybe he was the one who kept this story alive, telling the story throughout his life about the day that Jesus took his food and fed so many people. Here in this story is also something about the generosity of God poured out as an act of his love for us. When I think about this story there are times when I don't even feel that I have anything like 5 small loaves and 2 fish to offer. But what I do know is

that when we are willing to offer what we have, a vision, a thought, a talent, a prayer, our hearts, our money, our faith – yes even mustard seed faith – then God can do something with it. I've seen it – I've experienced it. Many years ago now when as a single parent I had very little money I needed £5 for an unexpectedly high bill to pay someone who I also knew. It was an embarrassing situation so I didn't tell anyone – I prayed. A friend of mine who also had very little money had been saving for a new blanket for her bed. God told her to give me £5. It came through my door anonymously. How hard that was for her. It was going to take much longer for her to be able to buy a new blanket. And then someone turned up offering her a new blanket. Of course, I didn't know about this until a very long time after the event. I think that we laughed at the miracle that she actually heard what God was asking her to do. There is nothing like realising and seeing just how generous God is to us to build up our faith, because that happened also to us both. But we have to want to be part of that by being willing to offer into God's service whatever we have and all that we are. God will bless it and if necessary, grow it and use it for the purposes of his kingdom. Can we give God a chance to use us in his story or are we afraid of what that might mean if we do?