

"THE MIRACLE OF CHRIST"

A Sermon By

Rev. Philip A. C. Clarke

Park Avenue United Methodist Church
106 East 86th Street, NYC 10028
March 3, 1985
Second Sunday in Lent

"THE MIRACLE OF CHRIST"

INTRODUCTION

One day Jesus took His disciples to the other side of the lake in order to get a rest from the people who were following Him. But the people found out where He was going and they somehow managed to get there ahead of Him. When Jesus saw them, His heart went out to them. He said to one of His disciples, "they're like sheep without a shepherd". He began to talk to them.

As the day went on, the concern of food came up. How could they be fed out in that deserted place. It was Jesus, according to John's account, who first brought up the question of food. "Where can we buy enough food for all these people to eat?" Even if they had had enough money, which they did not have, it wouldn't have been enough for the crowd that had gathered. Besides, no stores..

Andrew, Peter's brother, made a suggestion. He pointed to a boy in the crowd who had brought his lunch along with him - five small rolls and two fish. Andrew meant to be helpful, but he must have realized right away that his suggestion only helped to magnify the shortage. No food at all was bad enough, but one boy's lunch to feed several thousand hungry people...it made the situation seem even more impossible. Andrew quietly added, "But what are they among so many?" "Nothing" was the answer.

DEVELOPMENT

Jesus then said to His friends, "Make the crowd sit down". You can almost feel the quiet that began to settle. "Make the people sit down". All the chatter ceases, the fussing and the fidgeting stops. You can begin to feel the power of the personality of Jesus taking hold of the hungry people. In His simple command there was a compelling note and the people who had been stretching every nerve sat down and waited to be fed.

Jesus then took the food the boy had brought. The five small rolls and the two fish. He thanked God for it and then handed it to His disciples to give to the people sitting there. The amazing thing was that there was enough for everyone and some left over. When they had all been fed and the people got up to go home, they had experienced a miracle of sharing and they said to each other, "This certainly is the Prophet who was to come into our world!"

REFLECTIONS

You recognize this to be the familiar story of the Feeding of the Five Thousand. It's a beautiful story, one of the relatively few stories about Jesus that was told by all four Gospel writers and two of them even tell it twice. They told it so often because the people loved it. We wonder why they loved it so much. We wonder if it has any meaning for us today.

First off, as we read this story we want to know exactly what took place. I do. We're inquisitive by nature and analytical by training. The clear implication, of course, is that the food was miraculously multiplied. We can be sure of this: the people who told this story actually believed that something miraculous happened and that's why they told it.

But now-a-days many people are not at home in the atmosphere of the miraculous. They feel a bit uncomfortable with it. Science has given us an understanding of the universe that the people of the First Century didn't have. The thought of Jesus interrupting all the laws of germination and growth to multiply food on the spot for meeting this immediate need is not altogether congenial to us. Added to this is the fact that we get from the Gospels the definite impression that Jesus Himself did not want to be thought of as a "wonder-worker". We remember that He refused

to turn the stones into bread when He was hungry in the wilderness. He refused to jump from the pinnacle of the Temple just to show God's miraculous power.

TWO FACTS I think there are two facts that we ought to keep in mind. One is that stories like this have something behind them. They're not made up out of whole cloth.

If we have any confidence at all in the integrity of the people who wrote the Gospels, we cannot think that they deliberately lied. Granted, the details of this story were probably exaggerated as the story was told and re-told, passed from one village to another - the amount of food got less and less and the number of people more and more, But, we should never lose sight of the fact that there must have been some kernel of truth, some core of fact around which these details clustered.

The other thing to remember is that unique people can do unique things. I once read that Mozart wrote a concerto before he was five. Ordinarily small boys do not do things like that, but Mozart was not an ordinary person. And so it is with Jesus. He was not an ordinary person. He was an altogether extraordinary person quite capable of doing things and saying things in ways that people had never witnessed up to that time, or since. He had a way of saying things that penetrated the hearts of people. Perhaps this day he said something about love and how love shares. A miracle of sharing? Who knows.

We're proud of our knowledge of the laws of God and how things operate, but we're in danger of locking God up in His own laws so that little or no room is left for the unusual, the extraordinary to happen in life. That makes for a dull universe.

CHRIST CAN MAKE A LITTLE
GO A LONG, LONG WAY....

Speaking personally, I would add this thought. We don't know exactly what happened and doubt if we ever shall. I know something much more important than that: I know and believe that Christ can take a little and make it go a long, long way. This is the important truth for us. This is why they told this story over and over again. Christ can take a little and make it go a long, long way.

He can take a little health and make it go an incredibly long way. He can take a little time, a little money, if you are willing to let Him have it, and He can multiply it into millions. He can take what little faith you have and make it strong enough to stand up against every conceivable enemy of the human spirit. He can take what little talent you have and put it to work in places where the results will be significant. This is the miracle of Christ.

Think, for a moment, how little He himself had and what He did with it. Nothing to live on and He increased what bit He had until it became what we call "the unsearchable riches of Christ". He had less than a dozen men to work with and not the most perfect ones at that and He made them into millions of saints and martyrs. He had an area less than the size of Vermont in which to work and He made it stretch until it covers the entire world. He had less than three years in which to do His work and He made them into the equivalent of Eternity. He had less than one boy's lunch to feed 5,000 hungry people and He made it enough to fill the need of that day with even some left over. Yes,

The Miracle of Christ. It happened then; it can still happen today. ..

The people with shortages of all kinds - a little health, a little energy, a little strength, a little money, a scrap of ability, a spare talent - these are the people who have heard this story time and again and have heard it gladly. It is a promise and the promise is from God through Christ,

"If you take what you have and let Christ use it in His way - that is, if you'll let love have its way... with all you have, it will be more than enough to meet any and every situation that may come your way in life".

PRAYER Speak to each of us in these moments, O God. Make us to feel your nearness and your presence. Speak to us of the miracle of Christ, and how through Him you work to reach others.

O God, in you we find our way in life.

Through you, we find our strength for life.

As we become aware of our deepest needs and our inability to meet them by ourselves, give us faith to reach out in your direction, always trusting where we cannot see and believing where we cannot prove.

Remembering Jesus and how he did miraculous things, revealing the love that rests at the heart of all life, we ask this in His spirit.

Bless us in our worship. We remember those of this parish who are hurting, who are lonely, who are faced with decisions, who celebrate birthdays, who return to school this coming week. Bless them and be with them to strengthen, sustain and uphold.

Remembering Jesus and how he did miraculous things, revealing that love that rests at the heart of all life and which comes close to us in the breaking of the bread and the taking of the cup. In His spirit, we pray.

**PARK AVENUE
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

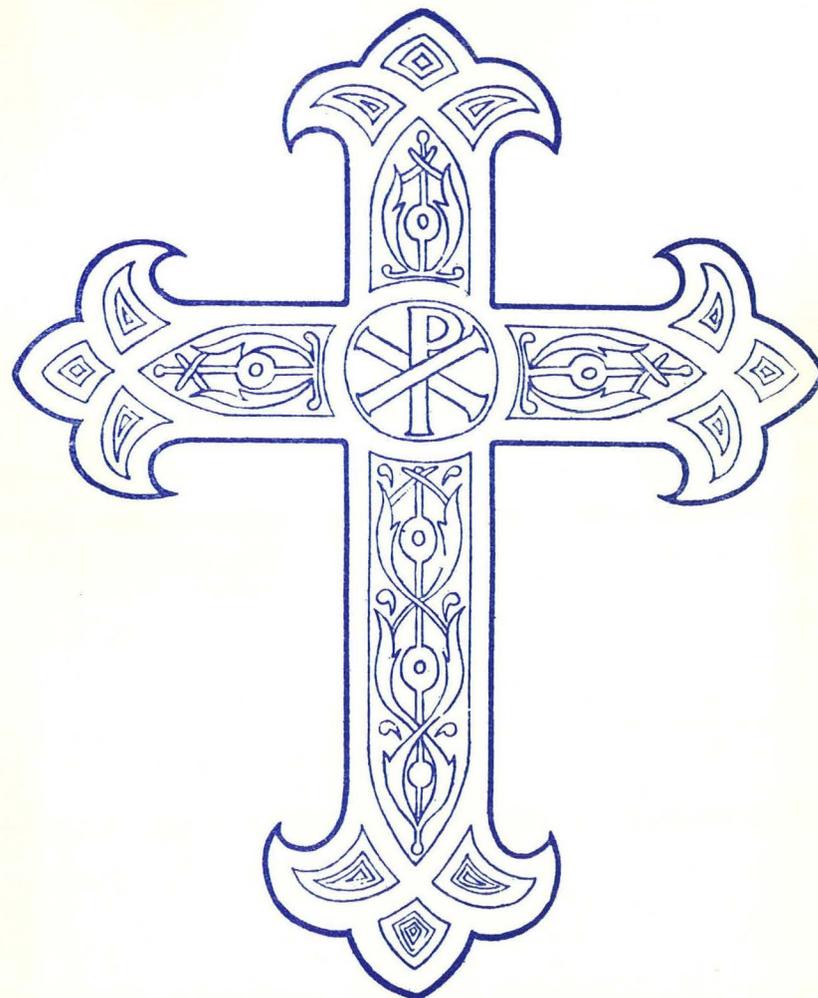
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**PARK AVENUE
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

September 7, 1980

ORDER OF WORSHIP

11 A. M.

ORGAN "What Hath God Wrought" Kellner

CALL TO WORSHIP

HYMN NO. 21 "All People That On Earth Do Dwell"

APOSTLES' CREED No. 738

GLORIA PATRI No. 792

SOLO "Panis Angelicus" C. Franck

(Bobbie Heron, mezzo)

John 6: 1 - 14

SCRIPTURE

PARISH CONCERNS

SOLO "The Lord Is My Light" Allitson

PRESENTATION OF THE OFFERING WITH THE DOXOLOGY No. 809

HYMN NO. 270 "O Love Divine That Stooped to Share"

MEDITATION "The Miracle of Christ" Mr. Clarke

PRAYER

THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION

Solo "Let Us Break Bread Together"

The Invitation (No. 832)

The General Confession

The Prayer for Pardon

The Prayer of Consecration

The Prayer of Humble Access

The Partaking of the Elements

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

HYMN NO. 165 "Lord, Dismiss Us With Thy Blessing

BENEDICTION

ORGAN "Voluntary" Croft

*** Interval for Ushering

A ROSE ON THE ALTAR

The rose on the altar today is in honor of Frank Sykes Wilford, son of Dr. and Mrs. D. Sykes Wilford. He was born on July 30th, 1980 at Mt. Sinai Hospital.

LAY READER

We welcome Mr. Joe Yoder as our Lay Reader today. A native of Lindsay, Oklahoma and a graduate of Oklahoma State University, Joe is an Account Executive for BBDO Advertising Agency. Here in the Church, Joe is a member of the Membership Committee and an usher.

TODAY'S SOLOIST

We welcome Bobbie Heron, a member of our choir, as soloist today. She serves on the Music Committee and the Membership Committee. Bobbie is the Chief Correspondent for the NYC Housing Authority Executive Correspondence Unit.

AN INVITATION

Punch and cookies will be served in the Russell Room after the service. Members and friends are invited to share in these moments of warmth made possible for us by Janet Frisbee, Elody Hoelscher and Beryl Wilks.

USHERS

The ushers today are Mr. Monge, Mr. Bishop, Mr. Breien, Mr. Brown, Mr. Acord, Mr. Murray and Mr. Williams.

THIS WEEK

The Council of Ministries meets Tuesday night at 7:30 pm and the Finance Committee will meet Thursday evening at 7 pm.

All tutors or those who want to be tutors for English As a Second Language are invited to meet together Tuesday evening at 8 pm at the home of Phyllis Balk.