

Sermon for August 3, 2008

Miracles can be found in everyday things....

In our text from Matthew today, we hear the very familiar story of the loaves and fishes...Christ performed a miracle in front of thousands of people.

When most of us think of the power of the Holy Spirit or miracles of Christ, we automatically think of material phenomena that cannot be explained by natural means and therefore are attributable to the Holy Spirit.

If in our congregation, during a particularly emotional sermon, we all started talking in tongues, we would say that the power of the Holy Spirit or the power of Christ had come upon us.

Likewise, if Rip put his hands on the head of a sick child and the child suddenly became well, we would say that the power of the Holy Spirit or the power of Christ had come upon us. We would proclaim a miracle.

All that would be true. But I do have this to say.....if that is the only interpretation of the action of the Holy Spirit and the power of Christ, that we have, we have missed the greatest contribution that the power of the Spirit makes to the individual heart and to the Christian Church. The power of the Holy Spirit in every generation is to be found not so much in the unusual, the spectacular, the bizarre, the unexplainable. The power of the Holy Spirit and the power of Christ is to be found in the lives of individual Christians who by that power are able to achieve triumph over prejudice; victory over unpleasant, hurtful memories; the conquering of self-pity and self-centeredness; the ability to rise above resentment and revenge; and the power to achieve peace of mind. It is in

these works of the Holy Spirit and the power of Christ that make the Christian religion powerful and vital in every day and every generation.

What happened when Jesus transformed the loaves and fishes has been happening ever since through the Christian religion: namely, the achievement of such a personal surrender to the will of God, such a linking of one human life with divine, omnipotent power that the miracle of a transformed personality takes place....a caring and transformed heart.

There are steps we can take to find transforming miracles in our lives. It takes more than wishing or deciding to change. I could decide I want to be a musician but that would not give me Giovanni's talent.

The Apostle Paul, the great interpreter of the Christian faith, knew that peace of mind only comes with a changed heart and freedom from an obsession of one's self when he wrote, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal."

The first step in achieving peace of mind is to try to get rid of selfishness. So long as I am concerned primarily with what happens to ME, with what people think of ME, with how much comes to ME, with how much attention comes to ME; as long as my life revolves around the narrow circle of ME, there is no possibility of finding peace of mind or a changed heart. That's what Jesus meant when he said, "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it."

The second step to achieve peace of mind is to get right with our neighbors. Next to selfishness, which makes us vulnerable to all the world can do to us, the most powerful enemies we have are resentments, hurt feelings, jealousies...all of the things that go with an unforgiving spirit. Other people can rob us of our happiness and peace of mind not

so much by what they do to us as by the way we react to it. There's no way we can have peace of mind if we're not at peace with others.

We must examine our hearts and minds to admit why we do not have peace of mind. Are we carrying grudges and resentment? Are we remembering that we have offended someone by word or deed and haven't made it right? Until we take our religion seriously enough to be willing to apologize, to be willing to beg someone's pardon, we cannot hope to have peace of mind.

Paul said, "as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." In so far as it rests with us, we can forgive those who have done us ill; we can live without resentment against those who have said evil about us, misunderstood us, sought as best they could to hurt us. Peace of mind can come only when day by day we put into God's hands the keeping of all that is ill between us and our neighbors.

The third step is something which the Christian faith alone is able to do for us. It is the step made by faith. It is committing our life to the idea that God is able, that we can't do this...it is too much for us. We are insufficient for so great a task as changing our hearts and finding peace of mind. God's power can perform miracles in our lives if we just let go and let Him take over. He continually works miracles even if we cannot understand them.

I leave you with three steps to changing a heart and achieving peace of mind:

1. Abandon selfishness.
2. Make peace with your neighbor.
3. Have faith that God is sufficient to see you through any problem.

If we relinquish control of our lives and place our trust in God with absolute confidence, then the peace of God, which is beyond human understanding, will cover us, protecting our hearts and minds. This is a miracle. This is true joy. Joy that G.K. Chesterton called “the giant secret of the Christian.”