

807. Mark 8:1-9  
July 6, 2008

### **A Miracle Proves Jesus' Power and Grace.**

I know some of you don't like politics. Some of you follow politics and culture with religious zeal. For some, perhaps, it is a fun hobby while for others political involvement is a civic duty. I imagine if I were to ask who you intend to vote for in the presidential election coming up, there could be at least two different choices.

Candidates, no matter what offices they are running for, make many promises. They are going to end the war; they are going to win the war; they will end our dependence on foreign oil by heading to new sources of energy or by drilling; they are going to fix our education system, our economy, our military, our healthcare, our standing in the international community, our immigration laws, and on and on.... Wouldn't it be nice to say to every politician: "Don't tell us, show us." Let's not just hear words; let's see action! (Besides—wouldn't it be really nice if all the problems and all the solutions really were as easy as they make them sound on the campaign trail.)

History is full of people who led by action, as well as by words. Unfortunately, history is also full of leaders who won elections based on good words, but who didn't deliver on what they promised. What kind of leader is Jesus Christ? Well, let's look at his record. He said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." He promised, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." He made these claims about himself: "The Father and I are One." and "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father." Those claims are pretty grand, aren't they? If you made such a claim to me, saying that you are God or that you are the true and only way to God, or if you would promise life and forgiveness from yourself, I would either dismiss you or ask that you prove it.

We have just read a Gospel lesson in which Jesus did just that. Let's review once again what exactly happened. It must have been just a few weeks before, that another large crowd, 5000 men, had been gathered. At that time, Jesus had multiplied five loaves of bread and two fish to feed them, and the disciples had picked up the leftovers—12 basketfuls. Now, 4000 men were gathered plus women and children. They were with him for three days, listening to him teach about the kingdom of God—the way God rules and reigns over people with his Word, calling, gathering, enlightening, and sanctifying the people of God. They must have been dedicated disciples to spend three days with him, even camping out in the remote area where they were. After three days, they had no more food. Seven loaves—all that was left.

Jesus felt sorry for the people. The translation here says he "had compassion on them"—literally, his insides were moved in pity. They have been here three days, and have no food. Send them home—many have a long way to go, and Jesus knew some would faint. The disciples then asked a question. (You know, when I teach Bible classes, I generally tell the people there is no such thing as a stupid question...but this one just may qualify.)

“Where can we buy enough food in this remote place?” Is their memory really so short? Was it really that long ago that Jesus had fed 5000 people? It must have been a deja-vu moment for them. Jesus took the bread, gave thanks and broke it and gave it to the disciples. As they passed it out to the people, there was always more. Enough to feed everyone, enough for all to be satisfied. After everyone had eaten, imagine- seven basketfuls of the leftovers were gathered.

As you read this selection from Sacred Scripture, do you feel the same as I? Do you see how many times you have been just like the disciples or worse? Do you see how faulty your own faith is? You ask the same stupid questions over and over again: “How am I going to get through this?” –as if you don’t remember the last time God pulled you out of a jam. You say, “How can God ever forgive me?” when time and time again he has forgiven you and everyone else, and promises that when we turn and repent, he is faithful and just and forgives us our sins and purifies us. Or don’t you see how you act? You say, “I believe in Jesus” but you act as if there is no god—pursuing dishonest gain or fleshly desires, hiding your drugs or drinks as if God doesn’t see. You are stingy and refuse to share what God blesses you with with those in need—don’t you know how abundantly God can and will repay you when you “cast your bread upon the waters?”

See, Jesus did not only tell of his compassion, his actions proved his compassion. If Jesus says he cares for you, you know he does. It is not an impotent, weakly and powerless feeling, but it is the AGAPE love of God; active love, love unconditional. It is love that led him to multiply the loaves as a miraculous sign. It was love that led him in compassion to travel the road to Calvary, to suffer there and to die for the sins of the very people he loved, you and me. In place of your sins of faithlessness, lovelessness, stinginess, God gives you the perfect faith, love, and generosity that Jesus fulfilled while he lived as a man on earth. In place of the punishments you deserved, God gave you his undeserved love, his grace!

Just as Jesus provided food for his followers in the remote place by breaking bread, he also has provided food for our souls through the breaking of bread. In the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, the Lord Jesus serves a meal of his own body and blood, the price paid for our redemption on the cross. Those who believe his promise recognizing the body and blood of the Lord in the elements of the bread and wine receive, and have received already, the forgiveness of their sins. The grace of God is delivered to us in this way, so that we live with him forever. Everything is guaranteed by the Holy Spirit.

The Bible is very clear when it says that we are saved completely by an act of God; his declaration that we all are not guilty because of Jesus’ perfect life and innocent death is a foundation that we can build on. What do we build? A temple of worship of God. We offer our entire selves as living sacrifices.

When Jesus miraculously fed the 4000, the disciples passed out bread and fish to those who were gathered. It was an act of faith, a bold statement of belief in Jesus’ power and love. You and I have opportunities, as well, to distribute the grace of God. I encourage you, this week, to take a bold step—empowered by the Holy Spirit—to distribute the love

of God. What can you do that is bold? Maybe you can share something that God has given you with others who are in need. You will not suffer if you share generously. God promises that many blessings will come through an act of generosity. Maybe you can do something you are uncomfortable doing, like speaking to someone who doesn't know Jesus. Let him or her know that God loves and cares for them through Jesus Christ. Doing that is like sharing your greatest treasure. And that treasure will not go away—it will only multiply. Amen—It is certainly true.