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Sermon

Four Words Which Changed the World

John 6:1-21

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In front of me was a group of teenagers who were not particularly interested in what I was going to say. They weren't exactly hostile so much as prepared to be bored and possibly have fun with the new and probably inexperienced teacher. I had four classes like that ahead of me

It was going to be a fun day!!

I asked them to read the Gospel story that we read this morning. Then I asked, "What was the first thing that came to mind as you read that?"

Each class answered in the same way; "How did He do that Sir?"

This is typical of the mindset of the culture in which we live. You will notice that they did not question the truth of the story. At least not yet. But how that question was answered would make all the difference as to whether they would believe that it really did happen.

It is the only miracle, apart from the Resurrection, that is recorded in all four Gospels. That says something of the centrality of this story in the minds of the early Church. With 5000 present there were plenty of witnesses to it. This sort of miracle has been repeated at times in slightly different ways throughout the history of the Church.

A Catholic Community in Southern America will tell you of a time when they were called by God to go provide a Christmas dinner for people who made their living searching through the city rubbish heap for things they could sell or even eat. The team expected to find about 50 people and to their surprise and consternation they found well over 100 people to feed and give gifts to. They began to distribute the food and gifts and found that no matter how much they gave out there was still more available. We have the video tape at home that is a report from the Priest to the Pope of what had happened.

I read a book about a revival in Malaysia (I think) in which the story is told of a Priest not having any wine for the Communion service. He placed water in the container to take to the service and when it was used it had turned into wine.

Many other stories can be told of miracles of this kind and others happening in various parts of the world within my lifetime. So much so that I was able to say that I have either read, experienced, or heard of every miracle told of in the New Testament happening today.

Despite all this many both in and outside the Church still question whether it really happened that way. Why? I have told you at other times of the way in which the way we begin to think about things changed in the 16-1700's. During that time people had become completely disillusioned with wars that were supposedly caused by religious belief. There had to be a better way!

To skip over a major and important shift in thinking in just a few words, eventually people added four words to the way we view our world and changed history as a result. Those four words were ***"In a Closed System."*** Let me explain.

Imagine the whole of what we would call the created order. Now place a box around it. Then say to yourself, "There is nothing outside that box." There is no God, there is no Devil, there is no Heaven, there is no Hell, there are no Angels, there are no demons. There is only what we can discover with our own unaided reason.

What this means for many in our world is that there is no possibility of miracles because there is nothing outside the Cosmos to intervene in any way. What appears to us as a miracle must therefore have some other explanation.

Now please note: The idea that there is nothing outside of the Cosmos is NOT a scientific discovery. It is like a pair of glasses with tinted lenses that determines the way we see things. It is the way we view the world.

Many of you will know of the great physicist Stephen Hawking. He is the man we see in a wheelchair who is unable to speak with out the aid of some sophisticated electronic devices. He wrote a book called "A Brief History of Time." I have listened to an audio copy of the book a number of times. When making a point, he said that he is a Logical Positivist. That shaped the way he looked at the world. Please note: That means that what shaped his conclusions was his *philosophy* NOT his scientific discoveries.

Let me illustrate this by showing how two different worldviews shape the way a Bible story is seen.

When we stage a nativity play, we have Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus with some animals around. In what I think was a Somalian presentation of the Nativity, Jesus and Mary were there but so were all of Mary's female relatives. Why? Because no pregnant woman from that culture would be allowed to go on such a journey without the women who would support her at the birth of her baby.

We see family as Mum Dad and the Children. Other cultures see the family quite differently. Which is better? Neither they are just different. There will be some problems peculiar to on view and a different set for another.

All of this has been an exploration of how it is possible for some of our fellow Church members to view things differently.

Could the feeding of the five thousand have happened? Of course, if you believe that there is more to this world and this Cosmos than what we can see and learn from unaided human reason.

Did it happen? Yes of course if, you believe that the Gospel writers were reliable witnesses of the event. There is plenty of evidence for its truth. We can be confident that the evidence points in that direction.

I have spoken to you of this so that you may have confidence in what you are reading and what you believe. If you want to read more, I recommend C. S. Lewis' book "Miracles". It is not easy reading in parts but well worth the effort.

Now let us return to story itself and the group of teenagers in front of me. How do I answer their question? The answer is that we do not know. We can offer some ideas Lewis does that in his book on miracles) but Jesus is not interested in satisfying our curiosity. He wants to see what the "sign" is pointing is to.

First, the Cosmos is NOT a "closed system." Many in our world believe that. Christians don't. If miracles can't happen then all of the rest of John 6 is nonsense, Jesus is not who He said He is and the Resurrection did not happen. But it did happen and so did the feeding of five thousand people with five loaves and two fish happen because the creator of the world and all that is has shown His great power in this way. So let us honor Him for that. "Let our praise to him be as incense" raising to His throne.

Secondly let us see the great gift that is being offered to us. The creator of all stands before you and me with arms outstretched. "Come to Me all you who have worked hard and are loaded down with cares. Let Me give

you rest, let Me give you nourishment for the journey. And when you have been fed let Me walk with you through all that life has to throw at you. Let me share with you the joys and delights of this world. Let me show you all that will cause you to stop in awe and wonder at the beauty of my world.”

Come!