

Jim Gill

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"God's Blessing"

Genesis 32:22-31 Matthew 14:13-21 Romans 9:1-5

INTRODUCTION TO CONFESSION--GENESIS 32:22-31

Jacob has a hard time at night. Last week we read that as he left his home to find his dream wife he had a dream of a Ladder coming down from heaven. Now as he prepares to return home he has another traumatic encounter in the night.

Jacob was a wrestler. He wrestled with his brother and came away with his brother's blessing... He wrestled with his uncle Laban and after 14 years of hard labor came away with 2 wives, their two handmaids, 11 children and many flocks. As he heads for home and faces the prospect of wrestling with his brother Esau again, he winds up spending the whole night wrestling and comes away with a new name ... and a limp. Hear the word of God from Genesis 32:22-31

INTRODUCTION TO-ROMANS 9:1-16

Jacob's new name grew to become the name for a whole nation consisting of 12 tribes. The apostle Paul, a Jew's Jew, understood that God had made a covenant with Abraham that extended to Isaac and Jacob and the nation of Israel. In Romans chapter 9-11 Paul wrestles with the dilemma that Jesus came to the people of Israel as their messiah, but many of them did not recognize him as such. Not only did they not accept him, some of them called for him to be crucified. In the beginning of chapter 9 Paul wrestles with this rejection and part of the answer that begins to dawn on him is that this rejection opens the door for others to become adopted into the family of God and to multiply the number of folks who can come to know the God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob. Jesus is the Messiah of Israel, and of those who will become grafted into God's family tree through God's grace to receive God's Blessing...

INTRODUCTION TO GOSPEL LESSON MATTHEW 14:13-21

If you've been to San Jacinto Hospital and been through the front doors and not the Emergency Entrance you might have seen a bronze statue of Jesus and a woman kneeling before him. The scripture on the plaque at the base of the sculpture is from this morning's gospel lesson. , "Jesus had compassion on the multitude and healed their sick."

Jesus compassion for the crowd wasn't limited to their need for healing. They not only hungered for healing they hungered for food.

In the life of Christ this miracle so impressed the twelve disciples that it is the only miracle of Jesus besides the resurrection that is recorded in all four gospels. It is the story of a small group of disciples facing an overwhelming need. Hear the word of God from Matthew 14:13-21

Let's pray. Open our eyes to see your truth. Open our ears to hear your voice. Open our minds to receive your word. Open our wills to respond accordingly.

Dr. H. King Oehmig tells a story of the time that a church congregation from Cartersville, Georgia wanted to begin a Habitat for Humanity group. It was in the early days of Habitat, so the group went to Americus, Georgia to meet with Millard Fuller, the founder of Habitat for Humanity. The group toured the Habitat facilities and saw a presentation on how groups operate. Then Mr. Fuller took time from his busy schedule to go and talk to this group. During the course of their conversation, one of the folks from Cartersville said, "Mr. Fuller, we think this is what God's calling us to do. But before we begin, how much money do you think we should have in the bank to get us off the ground?"

Fuller leaned toward the man and in a very low and serious voice told him, "It would be wholly irresponsible, completely negligent, totally feather-brained if you started an affiliate without at least one dollar. But you have to have one dollar. Don't you dare make a move without it!" (1)

Here in Baytown we have seen 43 miracle houses built. Each one starts with at least a dollar. For some reason God likes to take what we have to give, no matter how small, and adds God's blessing.

Ours is not a Lone Ranger faith. The Lone Ranger may have been the only Ranger, but even he had Tonto. To be a follower of Jesus is to be in partnership with God and others. It is a partnership of people of faith working together. Miracles begin with the compassion of God, but they are greatly enhanced when we give God something with which to work. We offer what we have and then God adds God's blessing.

After a marathon of healing the disciples determine that gathered multitude is hungry, which probably means that the disciples are hungry as well. When they bring this to Jesus attention Jesus he tells them to give the crowd something to eat.

A man was packing a shipment of food for the poor people of Appalachia. He was separating beans from powdered milk, and canned vegetables from canned meats. Reaching into a box filled with various cans, he pulled out a little brown paper sack. Apparently one of the pupils had brought something different from the items on the suggested list. Out of the paper bag fell a peanut butter sandwich, an apple, and a cookie. Crayoned in large letters was a little girl's name, "'Christy - Room 104.' She had given up her lunch for some hungry person. (1)

It reminds me of our last Vacation Bible School. In one week the small group of children brought 500 items of food for our Food Pantry.

In Matthew's telling of the story the disciples say, 'We have nothing but five loaves and two fish.' In the gospel of John's telling of this story it is a small boy comes forward with his lunch.

Over the years there have been a number of attempts to "explain" this miracle of the feeding of the 5,000. One attempt says that the people were so moved by the generosity of the little boy that they brought forth the food they had hidden under their clothes and in their traveling pouches. But that doesn't explain the leftovers. Would 5,000 men, not counting women and children, have said to themselves before leaving home, 'You know, we better pack our lunches and pack extra in case a little boy decides to share his lunch so we can be inspired to share ours. Lets pack enough extra so there will be 12 baskets of leftovers.

No, Jesus took the little boy's lunch of 5 loaves and 2 fish and blessed them and broke them and 5,000 men, not counting the women and children were filled. The disciples began by wondering how this crowd could be fed and they wound up wondering what to do with the leftovers!

Tony Campolo is a professor emeritus of sociology at Eastern University in St. David's Pennsylvania and a popular speaker. He was once invited to a women's conference where he was to give a major address. These women were being challenged to raise several thousand dollars for a mission project goal. While Campolo was sitting on the dais, the chairperson turned to him and asked him if he would pray for God's blessing as they considered their individual responses to the goal. Campolo stood and--to the utter amazement of everyone present--graciously said "no."

He approached the microphone and said, "You already have all the resources necessary to complete this mission project right here within this room. It would be inappropriate to ask for God's blessing, when in fact God has already blessed you with the abundance and the means to achieve this goal. The necessary gifts are in your hands. As soon as we take the offering and underwrite this mission project, we will thank God for freeing us to be the generous, responsible and accountable stewards that we're called to be as Christian disciples." And they did. (2).

One little boy brought his lunch. Each one of us has something that we bring. When we do we trust that what we give will be multiplied by God's blessing.

In 1922, some folks came to Jesus and said, "Lord, there's some folks in Pelly and Goose Creek and Baytown that are hungry for the Word of God. A brave and determined group of people looked at this part of the world and had compassion and chose to start a church to minister to this community.

In 2006, a re-gathered group of folks came together and determined that a new chapter in the life of Presbyterians needed to be started and they built this church, this "Miracle on Main Street."

Jesus is looking at us and at the community around us and his heart is filled with compassion. Jesus is taking what we have to give, our time our talents our gifts

of money and our elbow grease so that God's blessings can be multiplied and our whole community can be fed. Jesus is saying to us, "You give them something to eat."

300. That is how many people are fed Monday through Friday with food distributed out of our kitchen through Meals on Wheels. That's 1500 folks a week. It's not 5,000, not counting women and children but it is a miracle made possible by volunteers and staff and the use of our Miracle on Main. .

Through Meals on Wheels we learned that some of those who received food were giving some of their one meal a day to feed their pets... So Angie Stanley and Linda Pratt started the Animal Food Pantry. It's not 5,000 not counting women and children and their pets, but it is a miracle made possible by volunteers and donations.

Every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon families come through our doors to receive bags of food. They are first interviewed by the staff of Love Network. Then Love Network calls us and our volunteers take turns being here on Tuesday and Thursday to stuff the bags and hand them, or roll them out to those who come.

Jacob was set for life. He left his Uncle Laban's home with a large family and even larger flocks. But Jacob had seen the ladder. Jacob wanted more than what he was able to provide by his own labor. Jacob wanted his Father's blessing and got that but Jacob wanted more. Jacob not only wanted his Father Isaac' blessing he wanted God's blessing. Like the little boy who offered his lunch Jacob sent portions of his flocks across the river as a gift to his brother Esau. He gave away part of what he had labored for for 14 years. He spent the night wrestling and wouldn't let go. Because he didn't give up, because he prevailed, he received God's blessing and Jacob, the wrestling trickster, became Israel which literally means "One who prevailed with God."

It wasn't easy. It came with a limp. But look at what came from one man who wasn't willing to let go until he had God's blessing. From that man Jacob came not only a new name but a new nation-Israel, and from that nation Israel came the Messiah, Jesus, who not only fulfilled the covenant made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but opened wide the doors to Cornelius, and Priscilla and Aquila and to us. We are not related to God by our bloodlines, but grafted into God's family tree by the blood lines that flowed from the cross of Jesus.

The disciples wrestled with what to do in the face of such a crowd of hungry people. They didn't know what to do so they took the challenge to Jesus. Jesus challenged them back. With what are we wrestling today? What do we want to see come to pass and won't let go until we see it? Do you have at least one dollar? This week the Presbyterian Women will be giving dimes. Do you have at least a peanut butter sandwich, and apple and a cookie? Are you willing to hang

on for dear life and not let go until you have God's blessing? It may come with a limp, but what a blessing. Whatever you feel God calling you to give do so knowing that when it is given it will be multiplied by God's blessing.

Let's pray, Dear Lord Jesus, take what we have and bless it. Take our gifts of time and talent and treasure and break them open and bless them and send them forth from this place to make a difference in our lives and in the lives that are touched by what we do in here and from here. We pray that you will take what we offer and make a difference in the lives of the men and women and children and pets you move us to bless each week.

- (1) Do You Believe in Miracles?, by John Bedingfield
- (2) King Duncan, "You Feed Them!" Collected Sermons, www.Sermons.com