

Genesis: 32: 22-31
Psalm: 17:1-7, 16
Romans 9: 1-5
Matthew 14:13-21

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May the words of my mouth and the mediation of my heart be acceptable to thee, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer, AMEN.

It's never a good thing for me to be on the side of the disciples because I know I'm going to learn something that makes me uncomfortable. Usually, it's a sharp reminder, as if I needed reminding, that my ways are at not like Jesus' ways.

Jesus had taken a boat to a deserted place after the beheading of his dear friend, John the Baptist. Hold onto that word for a moment. Beheading. It's a hard word to even say—like lynching—because it's synonymous evil. Grief stricken, Jesus must have felt desperate to get away. But thousands followed him and when he went ashore, there they were. Despite whatever else he felt, Jesus, filled with compassion, cured their sick.

That should be enough, right? It was late in the day. I'm right there with the disciples who urged Jesus to send them away. But Jesus was never about making perfect sense. Not only would he not send the crowd away, he told the disciples to feed them. Can't you just imagine what the disciples thought? I surely can. But

Jesus would no doubt come to his senses when he realized there were only two loaves of bread and five fish. But there wouldn't have been a miracle if he did.

The story of the "Feeding the Five Thousand" is in all four gospels, and feels like one we've all heard close to 5 thousand times. Theologically, it offers a choice. This can be a story about scarcity and abundance. Or, it can be a straight up miracle. In the end, we have utterly no idea of what happened which is what makes it so powerful. We have to bring ourselves to it and where it leads.

Fresh insight for me came from a Roman Catholic scholar, Megan McKenna, who points to the significance of the last line: "And those who ate were about five thousand men; besides women and children."

Oh. Full Stop. This text could be called "Feeding the Five Thousand Men."

McKenna points out that while men might set out into the wilderness without food, a woman with her children would not. Not then and not now. McKenna says, "If that's true, then it was exactly the ones who didn't count that made the miracle happen."

Revelatory, right? The ones who didn't count, made the miracle. Think of how

transformative that is. Think of those who don't count who've made miracles for you. It took me half a century to realize that one of the most important spiritual teachers in my life, has been my brother, Mark. His special needs mean he's not counted the same way as everyone else if he's counted at all. The miracle is my realization *that it is I* who have special need of him to learn his lessons of love, kindness, and non-judgment over and over again.

Then there is the miracle of the "boy from Troy" Congressman John Lewis whose funeral was held Friday in Ebenezer Baptist Church, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s former pulpit.

Invisible as a poor kid from Troy, Alabama, growing up in the Jim Crow South, Lewis was guaranteed not to count, destined not to count. Lewis was 15 when Emmett Till was murdered at 14. "He was my George Floyd..." Lewis wrote.

I will never ever forget the moment when it became so clear that he could have easily been me. In those days, fear constrained us like an imaginary prison, and troubling thoughts of potential brutality committed for no understandable reason were the bars.

At that same time, Lewis heard Martin Luther King, Jr., on the radio. He remembers saying:

We are all complicit when we tolerate injustice and that it is not enough to say it will get better by and by. Each of us has a moral obligation to stand up, speak up and speak out. When you see something that is not right, you must say something. You must do something.

And for the next sixty-five years, that's exactly what John Lewis did. He stirred up what he called "good trouble, necessary trouble." Beaten so badly while demonstrating for voting rights he could taste his own blood but a short while later, the Voting Rights Act was passed in 1965.

At his funeral, this dirt poor kid, seemingly destined to be uncounted and unseen, was eulogized by three former presidents. What a miracle Jesus made in the life of John Lewis, who although ordained in the Baptist Church, chose a life of activism beyond the pulpit.

While the words of Presidents Bush, Clinton, and Obama were inspiring it was the words John Lewis wrote to be read on the day he was buried which just as surely as on the hills of Galilee two thousand years ago miraculously fed and nourished millions of parched souls, like my own, starving for hope. Jesus' life was a call to action, just as final words of Congressman John

Lewis:

Though I may not be here with you, I urge you to answer the highest calling of your heart and stand up for what you truly believe. In my life, I have done all I can to demonstrate that the way of peace, the way of love and nonviolence, is the more excellent way. Now it is your turn to let freedom ring.

When historians pick up their pens to write the story of the 21st century, let them say it was your generation who laid down the heavy burdens of hate at last and that peace finally triumphed over violence, aggression and war. So I say to you, walk with the wind, brothers and sisters, and let the spirit of peace and the power of everlasting love be your guide.

AMEN

