

Script Worship Resources - *Miraculous*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xoO28wcdlgU>

Pentecost 9, Year B,

25th July, 2021

Ephesians 3:14-21 NRSV / John 6:1-21 NRSV

Prelude

Welcoming Guests/Announcements

Pass the Peace

Opening Music *There is a Place of Quiet Rest* **5**

Call to Worship (*Responsive*)

One: The foolish say, "There is no God!
We are alone, on our own."
We gather to declare

All: the glory of God in our lives.

One: The foolish say, "It is your life;
you are accountable to no one."
We gather, strengthened by the Spirit,

All: trusting that Christ dwells in our hearts.

One: The foolish say, "Everything I have is mine;
I owe nothing to any one."
We gather to praise the One

All: who calls us to serve others in love.

Invocation

God, the eyes of all look to You in hope; and You give them what they need.
You open Your hand and satisfy the hunger and thirst of every living thing.

We, too, turn to You again, longing to be filled—to eat of the Bread of Life, to drink
from Your life-giving streams, to taste Your goodness and live.

May the time we spend together in Your presence nourish our hearts and minds;
may it strengthen our relationship with You, and renew our commitment to live in
this world as Your faithful disciples. For You alone are God, the Source and Sustainer
of life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Epistle Reading

Ephesians 3:14-21 NRSV

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,^[a]

from whom every family^[b] in heaven and on earth takes its name.

I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit,

and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.

I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth,

and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine,

to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Hymn *When the Storms of Life are Raging*

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A Time of Prayer

Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer

Loving God, You are our Creator and Sustainer. When You open Your hand, You satisfy the hunger and thirst of every living thing. And so we look to You whenever we are in need, trusting in Your love and Your abundant goodness.

As You once fed the hungry crowds with five loaves and two small fish, we ask that You would again fill those who are empty this day. Pour out Your Spirit on all who hunger and thirst.

We pray for those who are physically hungry—whose stomachs are empty. We think especially of the people in Somalia and Eastern Africa who are facing critical food shortages; who are suffering the effects of malnutrition and starvation; and watching helplessly as loved ones die.

We pray for those who are empty emotionally—who are lonely and long for companionship and love, who are caught in the grip of depression, or overwhelmed with grief.

We pray for those who are spiritually empty—who are troubled, but don't know where to turn; who long for purpose and meaning, but don't know where to look; who need You, but do not yet know You.

God, we praise You for Your abundant gifts in our lives. Pour out Your Spirit on us as well. Fill us with Your compassion and love, so that we would willingly share some of our abundance with those who have need.

God, in Your mercy, open Your hand. Pour out Your Spirit, so that we may be filled. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, who came so that all of humanity might come to know the abundant life that comes from You. Amen.

Gospel Lesson John 6:1-21 NRSV

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias.^[a]

A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick.

Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples.

Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near.

When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?"

He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do.

Philip answered him, "Six months' wages^[b] would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little."

One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him,

"There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?"

Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they^[c] sat down, about five thousand in all.

Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted.

When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost."

So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets.

When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world."

When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea,

got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them.

The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing.

When they had rowed about three or four miles,^[d] they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified.

But he said to them, "It is I;^[e] do not be afraid."

Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.

Message ***Miraculous***

What do we think of when we hear something that just seems too good to be true? Something so outlandish it just can't be in the realm of possibility. We tend to dismiss such things as fairy tales and tall tales, or in the case of the modern political arena, attribute them to conspiracies or plots. In our prehistoric and early recorded history, these stories and events were often invented to explain the natural phenomena we observed that we just could figure out. Storms and natural disasters were the results of fights and wars between the gods. Natural disasters and famine were the same gods being angered and taking their revenge out on their ungrateful or wayward followers. However, as human knowledge and understanding progressed, we began to seek rational explanations for all those fantastic events and stories that we had relied on to explain our world. We relied less and less on legends and folklore and more on reason and the sciences we developed to prove our theories.

In today's world, we rarely experience things we can't find a rational explanation for. We often view those old legends and folklore as the fantastic tales from our more primitive past. From our modern perspective, how do we approach these kinds of stories in the bible?

Today we have two such stories from the life of Jesus: Feeding five thousand people with five loaves of bread and two fish, and Jesus walking on the waters of the Sea of Galilee. The Gospels seem to abound in miracles attributed to Jesus – two of the best known are given in this passage. Such accounts seem to have impressed the premodern mind. The “argument from miracles,” one of the traditional ways of demonstrating the existence of God, was applied to believers to the question of Jesus' identity: he must be divine because he is capable of these extraordinary feats, defying human comprehension.

The writer of John's Gospel uses these feats to reinforce the common tradition of Jesus Christ as the very Logos (“Word”) of God, as is the focus throughout his writing. While this appeal to the miraculous element was undoubtedly a natural, even a necessary aspect of the early church, a group which had no external authority for its claims, for the post-Enlightenment mind, it does not necessarily carry the same weighty impressions.

Most of us bring precisely that critical, rational “mind” to our reading of ancient texts. Beyond failing to impress, the miracles of the Bible frequently repel belief today, or are subjected to the apparent need of modern humans to “joke” about once sacred things – as in the musical *Jesus Christ Superstar*, when Herod invites the holy “Superstar” to “walk across my swimming pool.” So what do we do with this appeal to the miraculous that doesn't appear to work in the same way today? How do we approach stories that are more apt to reinforce doubt than encourage faith? The real problem with focusing exclusively on the extraordinary aspect of these “occurrences” is that the truly miraculous element is obscured.

What is truly full of wonder in biblical terms is not that a seeming human being could multiply fishes and loaves to feed a multitude, but that this truly human being could represent, by his words and deeds, such a sign of hope and healing that hundreds of needy people would follow him about, and feel that their hunger for “the bread of life” had been satisfied.

What is truly awe-inspiring is not that someone could walk on water without sinking, but that his presence among ordinary, insecure, and timid persons could calm their anxieties and cause *them* to walk where they feared to walk before – in the end, all the way to their own crosses.

What is genuinely miraculous is not that a dead body should come to life again, but that through the journey with the crucified one, the disciple community was enabled to find hope on the far side of despair, faith that could live with doubt, and the courage to live

beyond the sting of death. In other words, when the miraculous is identified too exclusively with those literally *incredible* things, the wonder of divine grace that permeates the *whole of life* is deprived of a witness.

But we shouldn't turn into devout skeptics and rationalize all aspects of the creative order and risk losing our sense of wonder. We could, if we want, tear these texts apart from an objective, rational perspective, delving deep into the linguistics involved, and come up with rational explanations for both stories.

Making the first story a tale about the initial food contribution of the boy inspiring others with secret food stashes to donate them to the common fodder, or the second an errant translation of Jesus being “by” the water instead of “on” the water make the stories shallow, and do not really mitigate the skepticism of the doubters. Nor do they eliminate the miraculous from the text; we cannot escape the biblical belief in a transcendent dimension.

Prescientific culture had the freedom to embrace the transcendent that modern people often find incredulous. A people grown skeptical about the extraordinary is likely to miss the extraordinary *within the ordinary*. The real miracles can be found in the created order all around us, if we take the time to recognize it. Elizabeth Barrett Browning said it best: “Earth's crammed with heaven, and every common bush afire with God; and only he who sees takes off his shoes – the rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.”

Where do you find the extraordinary in your world? For some of us it's out in nature, hiking the mountains, experiencing the ocean waves and breeze. For others, it may be in the faces of children or grandchildren. Where do you find your burning bush, the place where you find the presence of the divine? And where can we find the miraculous together? That is the bigger question. As the body of Christ, we can get too caught up in the details of these stories and their application that we miss the extraordinary at work around us and in our midst.

Often the boy giving up his lunch is used to motivate those to donate from their own personal stashes, and makes God a divine therapist counseling charity among a greedy people who already know better.

We can learn valuable lessons in not getting caught up in the details. Too often we can be like the disciples in the boat thinking that God has withdrawn to a far away place and left us to pick up the slack and do all the work in the here and now.

It's not so much the miraculous stroll across the lake that calms their anxiety as they recognize their savior walking alongside them, and giving them the support they need. Too often we too go about our activity reading ourselves into the stories, without seeing God at work and present around us.

In the coming weeks, I have an assignment for each one of you. I'm tasking you with taking a deeper look at the world around you and the people you interact with. When you go about your days and weeks, look for the divine at work, look for the burning bushes of today. When you meet people at home, at work, at the grocery store or coffee shop, look for the divine spark within them, in what they say, the questions they raise or the suggestions they make, the actions they take. When we meet again, we can take time to share those experiences, or you can share them in the comments on YouTube or Facebook to witness to the hidden miracles in plain sight we overlook every day. And maybe, just maybe, we as individuals, and as a church, might find a way to support and expand our Creator's efforts. May it be so. Amen.

Call to Serve

Jesus said, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." As we have been granted great abundance, let us offer up those blessings in God's name.

As we listen to the following music from Annie, let's think about how we can support God at work in our community and world, as individuals and as a community, with the resources we have been blessed with.

A Time for Reflection

Annie Center

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

On my own what I have to give doesn't amount to much in the light of all you have given to me and in the face of so much need.

Put together as a congregation, what we offer you here in love becomes more, not simply added together, but somehow multiplied in its usefulness. We ask you to bless our gifts and with the addition of your blessing, just as it was with the loaves and fishes, there is enough for all. Amen

HYMN

Beyond a Dying Sun

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Benediction

I ask God to strengthen you by the power of the Spirit—not a brute strength but a glorious inner strength—that Christ will live in you as you open the door and invite him in.

And I ask God that with both feet planted firmly on love you'll be able to take in with all Christians the extravagant dimensions of Christ's love.

Reach out and experience the breadth! Test its length! Plumb the depths! Rise to the Heights! Live full lives—full in the fullness of God.

God can do anything, you know—far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams! Not by pushing us around but by working within us, through the power of God's Spirit.

All glory to the God of Creation! All glory to the Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ!
And all glory to the Spirit of God, at work among us and within us! Go in the love of God! **Amen.**

Postlude