

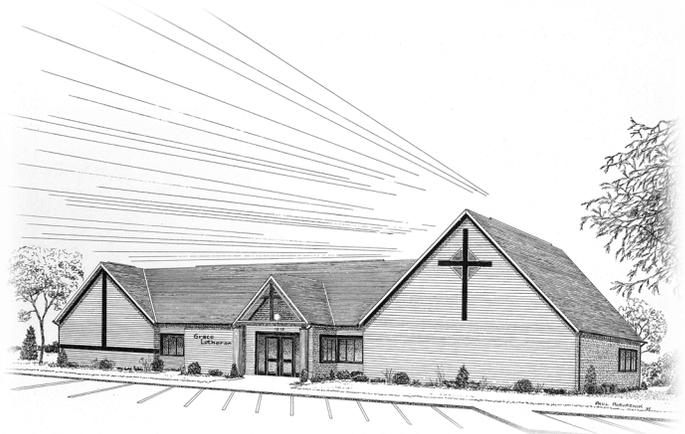
The Seventh Sunday after Trinity

July 26, 2020

Pastor Daniel Naumann

Mark 8:1-9

## GOD'S HAND AT WORK



Have you ever seen the beauty of the northern lights? What causes that spectacular show to light up the night sky in some places? There is, of course, a scientific explanation to it. Solar winds, heated by the sun, charge helium and hydrogen particles in the atmosphere over the polar-magnetic fields

of the earth and those charged particles show up in ribbon-like lights. But does that really give us the cause of the northern lights? Who stands behind the sun's heat and the earth's poles and the particles in the atmosphere? Who put the stars in the night sky? Where does the light come from that refracts through the atmosphere? How did the atmosphere get to such an extent that the day sky is blue, and the night sky is lit up by a marvelous moon and stars and sometimes has beautiful sights like the northern lights? How does that happen?

Sometimes we forget or neglect the fact that God's hand is at work in all things. It's nothing more than the natural knowledge of God, that you can see and appreciate God working in the tiny seed that grows into a huge tree, or a star that rises in the exact same spot night after night. You can see it in the phases of the moon, or in a baby who grows inside his mother. These are wonders of God that are seen in very natural ways. And because we have this tendency to forget about God working in normal ways in his creation, God gave us greater, more spectacular ways in which he occasionally worked. We call them miracles.

We have just such a miracle in our text this

morning from Mark 8. You are all undoubtedly familiar with Jesus feeding the 5,000. It's one of the few miracles that is recorded in all four of the Gospels. But perhaps you were unaware or had forgotten that Jesus did something similar a second time when he fed 4,000. But there are some key differences between these two miracles that we would do well to notice. The text begins with these details: *"In those days, when there was again a large crowd and they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples and said to them, 'I feel compassion for the crowd because they have already stayed with me three days and do not have anything to eat. If I send them home hungry, they will faint on the way. Some of them have come from a long distance.' His disciples replied, 'Where can anyone get enough bread to feed these people in this deserted place?'"* (1-4).

The first thing that sticks out to us as we listen to Jesus' words is this feeling of compassion. This is a unique word that expresses an internal pain over emotion where your guts or your insides actually get twisted up. Jesus is experiencing physical pain caused by his love for the people. But what is causing such compassion? In the feeding of the 5,000 Jesus uses the same word but it is because the people are like sheep without a shepherd. They are lost, and they need him. But the context is quite different here. These are people who know Jesus and trust him enough to follow him not to a hillside right outside of a city, as it seemed was the case with the feeding of the 5,000. The disciples let us know that they are in a "deserted place" or in the wilderness. They are in a desert. The people followed Jesus wherever he took them, and they followed him to listen to his Word. In fact, they listened so intently to

Jesus' Word for three days that they forgot to get hungry and forgot to take care of their basic need for food. And since Jesus led them into the wilderness, there was nowhere for them to get enough to eat. So, Jesus doesn't have this painful compassion over spiritual needs in this case, but instead over physical needs. He has painful compassion because the people listened to his Word and suffered for it.

Now, it's interesting to note who caused this basic suffering of hunger. I don't mean to play the blame game, but wouldn't we have to point the finger at Jesus here? Why did he lead them out to the wilderness? Couldn't he have picked a less remote spot to be able to teach these people so that they could then be fed? Well, of course, Jesus always had in mind what he would do, but here he creates a need so that he could fulfill a need. And we get to see a greater miracle (that Jesus feeds 4,000 miraculously) so as to be reminded of God's compassion for us in his lesser works when he feeds us normally. God was always going to take care of his people. Those who were following him into the wilderness to hear his Word were the same people who would recognize God's hand at work through the farmer who provided the food to buy

in the market with money earned from a job to put the food on the table for which the family could give thanks to God. Jesus would always provide that. Here he simply did it in a miraculous, extraordinary way rather than in a normal and natural way. But the people trusted him no matter what.

It's not that often that we get to hold up the crowds who followed Jesus as the example to follow. But here, they put us to shame, don't they? Do we have the same kind of trusting devotion for our Savior to provide for our simple and basic needs as this crowd did? We need to eat. We need to have a house or shelter. We need human interaction. We need exercise and play and rest and relaxation and work and an income. We need all those basic, natural, human needs. But as though God weren't

going to provide for them, how often do we run to take care of those needs ourselves at the expense of tending to the much greater need of hearing God's Word? To put it a different way, would you have come out with me this morning to have a worship service in the wilderness instead of so close to home? Do you come to church when it is convenient or because it is convenient? Would you be willing to suffer loss for the sake of hearing the Word? If we would be willing to suffer such loss, why do we flee to the laundry first thing in the morning instead of to our Bibles? Why not suffer the loss of time in the day to listen to God's Word? Or what about sports of our children or grandchildren? Are we willing to suffer the loss of a practice or even a game in order to spend an hour in the Word at God's house? What

about a second or third hour to be in Bible class? What about doing that every Sunday? Or what about when work conflicts with regular worship? We must work, right? That's how God provides, as though he couldn't provide in any other way. So, we take care of those things, but at the expense of the Word of God. You see, when we start thinking about our needs, we so often are foolishly led to believe this trick of Satan, that if we don't

take care of those needs then no one will. We forget God's hand at work in all things. We forget that we wouldn't be able even to take a breath if God were not sustaining us and this universe, let alone work or play or take care of the chores or do anything else. And once Satan convinces us of that lie, then it's easy for him to get us to take care of such needs at the expense of the Word of God.

Well, dear friends, take another look at God's gracious and great miracle in the feeding of the 4,000 and be amazed at God's hand at work. *"[Jesus] asked them, 'How many loaves do you have?' 'Seven,' they said. He commanded the crowd to sit down on the ground. Then he took the seven loaves, gave thanks, and broke them. He gave the pieces to his disciples to distribute to the crowd, and they did*



*so. They also had a few small fish. He blessed them and said that these should be distributed as well. The people ate and were satisfied. They picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. About four thousand men were there. Then he sent them away” (5-9).* Jesus provided for exactly what the people needed, and here he did it miraculously. And Jesus did it abundantly. From just seven loaves, Jesus gave enough for all to be “satisfied,” and then to provide for seven basketfuls left over. These weren’t the same as the baskets at the end of the 5,000, those were small. These were much bigger baskets. Jesus provided miraculously and abundantly. That miracle wows us, doesn’t it? It causes our jaws to drop to the floor in amazement of how God’s hand is at work in a supernatural way. Praise be to Jesus, who proved yet again that he is God himself, and he is the God who cares for the people. He cares enough to feed them, and he cares enough to teach them.

But dear friends, don’t so quickly close your mouths as though the amazement ends there. Be stunned again as we consider the lesser marvels and wonders of God’s creation. One corn kernel produces such a crop and such a harvest, so that millions of people are fed and sustained every single day. God be praised for his hand at work. God, in a very normal and every-day way, provided for families to have children safely and gives us means to care for them. God be praised for his hand at work. God gives us the beauties of his creation, the stars in the sky and the sun that lights the day, the rain that falls to the earth and the fire that warms us at night. God be praised for his hand at work. These aren’t strictly miracles, dear friends, but they are no less marvelous works of God’s gracious hand given to us simply because he loves us. And you can only appreciate God’s hand at work when you know God from his Word. Only believers can look at creation and praise God for its beauty and his providence.

But dear friends, don’t think that we never get to see miracles anymore. They happen for us every single day. We may call many things miracles, but a miracle, strictly speaking, is something that God does which is beyond nature. Miracles are supernatural things. The rain only falls by God’s command, but God designed nature to rain. It’s not really a miracle. But consider for a moment what would be the natural course of things if you had not heard the Word of God. According to our natures, we would die eternally. In fact, by nature we were already spiritually dead. So, consider the miracle that had to take place when God intervened and brought you from spiritual death to spiritual life when the Holy Spirit brought you to faith through the gospel. That is a supernatural miracle of God. Or consider how simple water which has no unique quality by itself is connected to the Word of God and suddenly that water then washes away sin completely and the Word brings a child to faith through baptism. That is a supernatural miracle of God. Or consider how we are about to come forward to the Lord’s table and receive from him the true body and blood of Jesus Christ, our Savior who died and rose again for us, that our sins would be taken away as we partake of the Lord’s Supper. That is a supernatural miracle of God.

When it comes to earthly things, it’s so easy for us to think that we take care of ourselves, forgetting that it is only in God that we live and move and have our very being. Every breath we take is a gift from his hand. How much more don’t we see God’s gracious and compassionate hand at work when sin is forgiven through the Word and the Sacraments? That, dear friends, is God’s gracious hand at work too. And as we depend on him for all things, we will joy to depend on him for both our physical as well as our spiritual needs. That’s what God’s hand does. It provides. It sustains. It saves. It forgives. That is God’s hand at work. Amen.

