

Proper 12 B  
July 29th, 2018  
St. John 6:1-21  
St. George's Episcopal Church  
Fr. Chris

### **A Prayer Answered**

“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 would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.’”

It seems impossible. The challenge is like climbing Mount Everest. How do you feed 5,000 people with the few coins that they possessed among them as traveling preachers? Not possible! Philip, being practical and a pragmatist, suggests that six months wages would not be enough to buy each of them a little bit of food.

Have you ever been in this place yourself? Needing a miracle, and totally flummoxed as to how you are going to make everything work? When we get ourselves into a tight fix, do we think of inviting God in to help us out?

And what are those tight fixes? For some it might be financial. We need more money than we could imagine having, to do something. Sometimes it is health related. We need to lose weight. We need to change our lifestyle to avoid getting an illness later on that we have been warned about. Or we have an illness that seems like a kind of sentence which cannot be avoided. We need a job, but no job can be seen on the horizon.

Most of all, those tight fixes are about money and not having enough of it to do what we want to do. The funny thing I have learned, from being both poor and having money is this: You can never have enough money, no matter how much of it you have, no matter how rich you are. This is a humbling realization that teaches us that life is about something more than more money.

In those tight fixes, we wish and pray that God would be like Santa Claus, in whom we have not believed for years, and give us the things we need, miraculously. It even sounds like deal making: “If I do this, will you help me God?” If I am a good boy and say my prayers at night, will you give me good

health or the money I think I need or the job I want?” “Please let me win the lottery, because people in my lottery pool at work need the money badly and they therefore need to win more than I do.” (As though winning the lottery was some sort of altruistic thing.)

There is that old caveat, “Be careful what you pray for, as you might just get it.” What we think we want and need may be far from what is best for us. I have gotten what I want in answer to a prayer, and believe me, though the surprise was nice at first, the tumult that “the answer” caused in my life was great and painful.

We often pray for miracles, but we do not know the miracles we are given in answer to our prayers when we really need something. God is not deaf to our prayers, nor insensitive to our needs. Look at Jesus, for example, in this morning’s Gospel, where he senses that the crowd needs food more than teaching. No one can learn things very well on an empty stomach, and these folks have been following him around for sometime, lacking food and sustenance.

Our prayers are answered with what we really need. God does provide, and God does so abundantly. Sometimes we need a gentle hand to guide us in the right direction. “Thy rod and staff are a comfort to me.” It’s like when you do homework: It is easy for someone else to do the problems for you and give you the answers, but you learn nothing. It is much better for us to figure out the answers for ourselves, with a little help maybe to point us in the right direction and correct us when we are headed in the wrong one. Most of the time, my experience is that this is how God has answered my prayers. It is about how to make what you have been already been given to work for you. God does help those who help themselves.

And then there are those miracles in answer to prayer, simply because God has the power to do so. Consider the one this morning:

“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 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.”

What good are five barley loaves and two fish among thousands of people? How could so little, feed so many? And yet, that is exactly what God did. God saw the crowds and knew they were very hungry. God provided. God fed the multitude. God also will provide for you.

We receive many miracles every morning when we wake up, for which we should be grateful:

- The fact that we were given another day to live.
- The wonderful eyesight that we have been given.
- The ears or the assistance to our hearing which allows us to hear the birds in the morning and the voices of family and friends and neighbors.
- The good health we enjoy.
- We have shelter.
- We have clothing.
- We have food on our tables.
- We even have transportation to move us around to where we need to go: either two legs, bicycles, cars, buses, or planes.
- We have everything we need if we think about it.
- We are truly wealthy people, especially if we have faith.
- We have an abundance! Our cup runneth over.

God knows. God provides.

It is again a question of what we want versus what we really need. Those are so easy to get confused. God always meets our needs when we ask, and most of the time, even when we don't ask. 'Give us our daily bread' has so many meanings in that simple prayer.

So if we need money because we are in debt or need to do something and we don't have enough to do it with, God will show us how to save, and how to avoid debt in doing so, and maybe how to get rid of the debt we have. God will show us the priorities of our lives, and like a wise teacher, lead us on the path to fulfilling those needs.

And then sometimes there are miracles, when they are warranted and least expected:

- A bonus at work
- An account that you forgot about that you have
- An inheritance
- And then there is, of course, the lottery.

God works in mysterious ways. God wants only the best for us, and sometimes the best will surprise us with grace and gratitude.

"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.”  
WOW! AMEN!