

The Word of Conviction

⁸But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Luke 5:3

"I don't think it's a miracle, at least a miracle in the way you do" the man asserted in a bible class I had a number of years ago.

"The miracle of feeding the 5000 where there were five loaves and two fish isn't a miracle of Jesus somehow making food from nothing to satisfy the hunger of the crowd. It was simply a miracle of getting those who had food, concealed in their robes, to take it out to share with those in need. It's a miracle of generosity."

What do you say to that? Well, next week things aren't so easily explained away. Next week came and we studied the Israelites crossing the Jordan river. And the challenger returned. "I don't think it's a miracle in the same way you think it's a miracle". I'm wondering, now what.

I get a geography lesson and a history lesson. "Doesn't anybody read The New Scientist Magazine or at least Popular Mechanics? Hasn't anybody read Immanuel Vilikovsky's "World's in Collision"? It's a book that explains all the miracles from a scientific perspective. Don't you know that in 1927 an earthquake caused a mud slide which stopped the river. This also happened in 1906, 1834, 1546, 1534, 1267 and 1160 just a century after the Norman Conquest?

Class after class went on like this and you've guessed it, when we got to today's story of catching fish in the sea of Tiberius in the deep water which all fishermen know there just isn't supposed to be the man from the New Scientists and pedler of Popular Mechanics was there to explain away, all the miracles of Jesus.

And as animated as always, he shared newfound revelations from modern times. Don't you know pastor? New Scientist reported that the Sea of Galilee is slightly salty because some saline springs punch through the mud on the sea floor and bring up salt (December 1996 issue 28 page 6) The man was meticulous.

For some reason, fish like to gather around them. It's probably that they prefer the slightly higher temperature of the water, rather than liking the more saline environment. We can speculate that Jesus was just a really smart scientist type who knew some of these facts that the poor ignorant people didn't and used his knowledge to promote his miracles and claims to deity!

Well, you meet people like this. They can explain everything and have an explanation for how things happened, 101 explanations, except for the one true explanation of how it happened. We call them lawyers. ... But really we have an understanding of what Jesus was talking about when he told the rich man a few weeks back "even if someone rises from the dead they will not believe". They have Moses and the prophets let them listen to them.

Jesus said “They have Moses and the Prophets” because he knew the power of the Word of God even as he was the Word of God. You can explain away everything but can you explain away the conviction you carry in your heart of your sins?

Not a chance, if you’re honest first with yourself. The story today isn’t just a mere miracle but rather the Word of God. It cannot be so easily explained away. It’s because this is the Word of God that the message has power. Mere miracles can always be explained away. But when it’s a true miracle undergirded by the Word of God it generates conviction of sin in a soul as it did in Peter’s soul until he declared: “Depart from me Lord for I am a sinful man”.

When Jesus calls, he makes the “fishers of men” who do not use mere miracles but the Word of God.

The net they would use is the message of the cross, which is foolishness and a stumbling block to the world (1 Cor. 1:18–25). The power of God to save is not in spectacular signs like wind and fire and earthquakes (1 Kings 19:11–21), nor is it to be found in human intelligence and wisdom. The power of God to save comes in the still, small voice of the preaching of Christ crucified. In worldly darkness the disciples could catch nothing. But in the light of Christ, whose Word was attached to the water, the boats were filled with fish. So it is that in Baptism you have been drawn in to the ship of the Church. Though the nets are breaking and some who hear the Word do not believe, pastors continue to cast the net of the Gospel and the Sacraments, that Christians may abide in the boat of the Church and that we may be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks a reason for the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:8–15).

It’s because Jesus is the Word and proclaims the Word that the miracle of Jesus has such great effect upon Peter. He senses His sin. He is confronted with his unworthiness. He senses the holiness of Jesus and declares “Lord, depart from me for I am a sinful man”. And because it is the Word that does this and the Word working through the miracle that we have hope concerning the effectiveness.

I do not know where my avid reader of the New Scientist and Popular Mechanics is today. Perhaps he will find or rather God will find him through this message surfing the internet. But having had a few more years of study I would like to ask. “You may be able to explain away the miracles but can you explain away that feeling of guilt so easily?”

When the hammer of the Law comes down. When the Sword of the Spirit pierces to the division of soul and spirit...(Hebrews 4:12)...” can you easily wish it away? Can you anesthetize yourself with booze or drugs and make it long lasting? Can you so easily send it away? Elijah could not. Peter could not. King David could not. He was to say:

³ For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me. (Psalm 51:3)

Are you stronger than a man who was hardened in the wilderness? Are you stronger than a man who could sail on the sea? Are you stronger than the man hardened by battle and skilled in diplomacy?

I ask all this knowing the answer. I ask all this rhetorically. We are a people with an empty gnawing heart. We are a people with that something missing. We are, that is, until we come as Peter, not wishing to explain things away but rather seeing the holiness of God and saying "Lord,I am a sinful man".

The power is in the still present. The power I'm speaking of is the power of the Holy Spirit. He continues to work through His Word, whether it's a miracle of Jesus, one of many parables, or even proper preaching on them in modern day. The severity of the Law does not change. Its power to convict the heart

The convicted humbled heart declares with Peter, "Lord, I am a sinful man". And with these words there is a turning point.

Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." ¹¹And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

All of them, Simon Peter, James and John were not to be afraid. When God's presence is with you there is no fear. Perfect love casts out all fear. What a true gift that would be. How much would you spend to get rid of your fears? Pause for a moment on that one. We save and invest for a rainy day out of our fear of poverty. How many other things do you do to placate your fears?

Now here we have the one who says "Do not be afraid". And he who commands the forces of nature carries the authority to make his command real. Because of this the disciples show the power of God's presence. They left everything and followed him for really, once you've tasted the power of God everything else is tasteless.

They will catch people for the kingdom of God. Isn't that something to participate in? Much easier to build a skyscraper or twist metal into girders. It's much easier to launch into space. But change a human heart? And persuade that heart for the good? Now that is truly something to behold. And the disciples leave everything to follow. They build for an eternal future.

Today we have encountered that which is most powerful of all. We encounter the very presence of Jesus Christ and His holiness. In the presence may we confess our sinfulness with Peter and then receive the blessings of Peter. We have a job to do. Fishers of men. To build the eternal kingdom. May we rejoice and be glad in it.

Amen.