

10th Sunday after Easter – Proper 13, Year A

A Sermon Preached by Fr Ian M Delinger

on August 2, 2026

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

*O Lord, You are near to those who call upon You.
You preserve all those who love You.
May my mouth speak Your praise, O Lord.
And may all flesh bless Your holy Name for ever and ever.*

When the Disciples gave Jesus the 5 loaves and 2 fish, and He looked up to Heaven and blessed and broke the loaves, this is the prayer that He might have said:

*Baruch atah, Adonai, Eloheinu melech haolam,
hamotzi lechem min haaretz.*

*Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the universe,
who brings forth bread from the earth.*

The Hamotzi, as it's known, has been around since just after Jesus' Resurrection, so His prayer would have been a precursor to the Hamotzi. The main thrust of it being the acknowledgement that it is God who brings forth bread from the earth.

This miracle is the only one that is in all 4 Gospels. That is an indication of how important the Gospel writers thought it to be. Here in Matthew's Gospel, the miracle is told in a brief 9 verses. Quite a bit of detail is left out, particularly details about the crowd.

One approach to this miracle is that Jesus didn't actually multiply the loaves and fish. It's the generosity of those who actually did bring some food that makes the miracle. Though the text is silent on the matter, it is possible that some of the 5,000 men, and the additional women and children had brought food with them.

What we *do* know is that the *Disciples* had only 5 loaves and 2 fish. They say nothing about the crowd. So, when Jesus looked up to Heaven and prayed, and then the Disciples began *sharing* what they had, it sparked a chain reaction among the crowd: those who had food with them began to share with those around them, thus, *bread was brought forth from the earth*, and as many as 15,000 men, women and children were fed, with leftovers.

When I last preached on the Feeding of the Multitudes in Matthew's Gospel, I focused on the miracle we collectively make through supporting charitable social programs, specifically the Food Bank. By working together, we create the miracle of *bringing forth bread from the earth* to feed almost 1/3 of households in SLO County! It's astonishing how many people in this County are living with food insecurity. But through our help – from the Good People of St Stephen's – and the help of so many others in this community, everyone gets to eat. That is a real miracle, and one that we can only accomplish together.

So, that's the obvious connection⁴ to make from today's Gospel with how you take Jesus' message into your daily life now: *pray together then do together and miracles are made*. But I want to use that same sort of collective miracle-making and apply it to our life here at St Stephen's.

As you can imagine – or may have contributed to, yourself – I get a lot of suggestions, good ideas, initiatives that “St Stephen's” should be doing, ministries that we miss. Back in February 2021 when our Vestry Retreat with its new and returning members was on Zoom, I asked each person to share their goals for their time on Vestry. Each person phrased that they wanted “*to see St Stephen's accomplish X.*” After everybody had a turn, I summed up for them the three most commonly mentioned, which I think were to see St Stephen's attract more families with children, see St Stephen's grow numerically, and see St Stephen's engage more with the community. And then I asked:

Who is the St Stephen's who is going to do that work?

And the Zoom squares were silent! So, we had a chat about who we are as St Stephen's. It's like in today's Gospel of the Feeding of the Multitudes: everyone shared, everyone pitched in, and the miracle happened! It's the same for us as the St Stephen's Family. We all have many and varied gifts to offer for the glory of God in this place. And when:

- One person brings their delicious homemade bread,
- And another brings their favorite California cheese,
- And another brings some sliced tomatoes and lettuce from their garden,
- And another brings some aioli they whipped up last night,

We *all* have delicious sandwiches for lunch. The same with what we want to accomplish here at St Stephen's:

- When those who enjoy engaging with strangers give of their time, we have enough people to serve our monthly meal at 40 Prado.
- When those who know how to fix things around the house give of their talent, we have a productive Parish Work Day.
- When those who are generous with their disposable income, or those who believe that their tithe comes *before* their disposable income give of their treasure, we have enough to pay our bills.

Those may not seem like miracles since they are everyday types of needs for a parish. But we *all* have an investment in St Stephen's:

- As the business organization that has bills, publicity needs, window blinds to fix, and a broken sewer system.
- As the group of people who want to get to know one another and spend time together.
- As a place where anyone can gather to worship and pray.

We are the St Stephen's who are here for all of that. We chose this place, this community, this organization through which to deepen our trust in God and to walk along our spiritual journeys together, to seek out Jesus in a deserted place and listen to what He has to say to us and be healed by His hands.

So, what are the miracles that we are attempting that will truly require the diversity of time, talent and treasure we have among us? I thought long and hard about whether this was suitable for a Sunday morning sermon, but here goes. At our 10 Years Together Anniversary Celebration, Bruno, as Senior Warden, asked the Senior Wardens of the past 10 years and then me what we would like to see in the future of St Stephen's. My response was comprised of 3 things that would make St Stephen's *sustainable* for the future:

1. More Fellowship activities and to see the congregation grow.
2. Close our deficit for 2026.
3. Grow the Endowment, specifically that some years from now, we could endow the Rector's salary and benefits and buy a Rectory.

Right now, those require miracles, indeed! There is no quick fix for any of them. But there is also no one else but those of us gathered to make these things happen. *We* are the ones who can make these miracles happen. If we have faith in the miracle that happened to feed 15,000 people with 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish, if we have faith that Jesus guides our lives even outside of Sunday morning, if we have faith in *each other* and this community we want to be a part of, we can make the miracles happen.

Let's look back at the Gospel that is our model for miracles to happen.

The Disciples came to Jesus and said, "This is a deserted place ... send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food." Jesus said, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." And he said, "Bring them here to me." He looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the Disciples, and the Disciples gave them to the crowds.

Who fed the 5,000 men, plus women and children? Who? *The Disciples!* Jesus did not feed them; He told the Disciples to do it! Their faith in Jesus as the Son of God sparked the miracle. And if we believe that it was possible that Jesus' prayer and

the Disciples' obedience sparked a movement of generosity and sharing such that a crowd the size of a sold-out concert at the Mid-State County Fair all ate their fill, we can believe that we can accomplish whatever miracles this community – we, the St Stephen's Family – sets out to accomplish.

We are the Body of Christ, and as the Body of Christ, we are part of making His miracles happen. One of the hard parts about being a Christian, a follower of Jesus, is realizing that our faith in God through Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit gives us power to do things more than we can ask or imagine.

Our power to work miracles is like Dorothy's Red Slippers:

Glinda: You don't need to be helped any longer. You've always had the power to go back to Kansas.

Dorothy: I have?

'Hunk': Then why didn't you tell her before?

Glinda: Because she wouldn't have believed me. She had to learn it for herself.

That's what our Journey with Jesus is about: learning for ourselves that we *already* have God's power working in us more than we can ask or imagine. Just read the Book of Acts. The Disciples spend 3yrs following Jesus and getting everything wrong. That's what the Gospels chronicle. But once Jesus ascends to Heaven, they suddenly learn for themselves what Jesus was telling them all along, and they continue His miracle-making. That's what the Book of Acts chronicles. Knowing that – getting to that place of understanding how our faith in Jesus gives us power to do amazing things – should give each of you great joy and happiness.

I've been reading various documents that summarize St Stephen's history as I prepare to generate a new history brochure. Here are some of the miracles made by this very same faithful community:

- On August 18, 1867, in this town that was only 1,500 people, persons interested in forming an Episcopal Church gathered, and before the end of

the meeting, 13 men had signed a resolution: *We whose names are hereunto affixed, being desirous of establishing the Episcopal Church in this place, do hereby associate ourselves together for that purpose.* That is when we became St Stephen's Episcopal Church.

- *By 1872, we had this plot of land for a church building.*
- *By 1889, we were 29 adults and 35 children.*
- *In 1892, we made plans for a rectory, which was completed and occupied by the rector and his family in February 1893.*
- *For our 70th Anniversary, we put in the stained-glass windows you see now.*
- *By the 1950s, we had 400 communicants on the rolls and 200 children in Sunday School.*
- *In 1970, we had a huge fire, and we accomplished all the reconstruction and repairs, and added the transept, within 2 years.*

Those were some pretty miraculous accomplishments! There was no one but the Good People of St Stephen's to accomplish those miracles! That's what church families do: they pray together, they do together, and miracles happen!

So, what miracles do we want to make happen? Do we want to grow numerically and become financially stable? If so, let's work *together* to make those miracles happen.

And like Jacob wrestled with the angel in our OT reading, we will experience some wrestling along the way. As we do, we *all together* will make God's miracles in this place at this time. We have those who have gone before us to thank. And we want to continue the wrestling and the miracle-making for those not yet here.

The miracle in today's story is NOT Jesus' doing; the miracle is the work of the people. Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, gave it – and the rest of the miracle was up to the Disciples and to the people. Every Sunday when we take bread, bless it, break it and give & take it, it is our call to make miracles happen with the bread that God brings forth from the earth.