

Miracles: transformational moments

BY J. DAVEY GERHARD



The Gospels of August 2020 contain two transformational stories in the ministry of Jesus that weave the strongest threads in our Christian tapestry. What do these stories have in common? Radical hospitality and abundance.

Together these two hallmarks of Christian values form our view of the Kingdom of Heaven and inform how we relate to our neighbors.

August is a month of Faith-Filled Generosity.

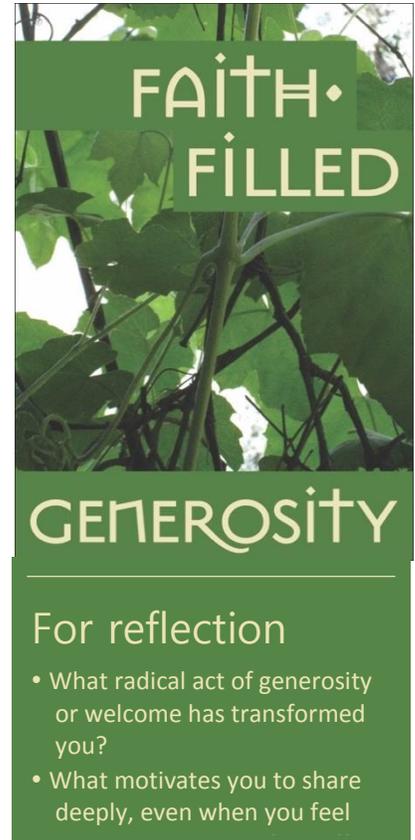
The first of these transformational moments occurs beside the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus spends a long day healing and teaching a great crowd. Do you, like me, wonder what he was teaching? Was he empowering them to free themselves from the oppression of worry and to focus on loving their neighbor? Was he reminding them that they were perfectly created children of God? Did he cure all kinds of diseases that day: emotional pain, disease, spiritual bleakness?

Whatever it was, it lasted late into the day, and, in yet another act of compassion, the Savior did not want them to leave before they had their fill of teaching, of healing, and of nourishment.

Scholars debate the actual miracle that occurred next. Did Jesus make a feast from a few scraps of food? Or did he unlock the sharing and compassion of the crowd, so that their own pocketful of food created a feast when combined with their neighbors' pocketful? Debating this miracle, to me, seems like counting angels on the head of a pin – the truth is that people were fed, a problem that needed a solution was solved, love happened here.

Scraps of food also feature in the second of August's transformational Gospel passages, as we learn about Jesus' conflicted relationship with the Syrophenician Woman. Jesus does not appear in this story as the virtuous, blameless hero — quite the opposite. If a passerby had filmed this on their phone and uploaded the scene to Twitter, would we have canceled Jesus for the racist and dismissive way he treats this woman who is outside the fold of the chosen people of God? When Jesus demands to be fed before tending to a sick child, and then compares the child to a dog, some might have backed down. Who is to argue with a man rumored throughout the countryside to be the Son of God?

When the Syrophenician Woman advocates for her child, and stands up to Jesus, two transformative miracles occur. The first is that the child is healed. The second, the transformation that echoes throughout the rest of history, is that Jesus himself is changed. From this moment he realizes his ministry is to heal all who come to him: Galilean, Samaritan, Phoenician, Jew, Pagan, regardless of religion or culture. We are the inheritors of this grace, of this generosity. When we share our gifts with the world, extending hospitality and creating abundance, it's nothing short of a miracle. Amen.



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