

Bennoch Church: 12th August 2012

I wonder what you do consider a miracle to really be; Britain's gold medal tally at London 2012, a peaceful end to the conflict in Syria, birth of a child or that unexplained healing. I suppose for each of us, the definition or understanding of miracle will be different. The Concise Oxford dictionary defines it as "*marvellous event due to some supposed supernatural agency*". For those who witnessed the miracles of Jesus, there was no debate about a supernatural agency, they believed in the hand of God controlling their nations destiny. It had begun with Abraham and continued through the promise of the Messiah; it was part of the expectation of 1st century Palestine. The debate in John 6, is over who Jesus is, and his claim to be Messiah and Son of God.

Today our understanding of miracle is very different. We want the unexplained, explained. We don't like the unanswered question that makes us think. We want the mysteries of the universe solved, and we live in the hope and the expectation that science, one day, will help us to do that. Even the definition hints at that understanding. "*Some supposed supernatural agency*". So God is pushed

to the margins, his role downgraded, if there are miracle's out there, one day we will be able to explain them. For many, God is not even part of their consciousness or if he does have a role to play, it is within the domain of private faith. For the church today, where does that leave the place of miracle? How can the church help people live with the unexplained and a sense of mystery?

It is only by not knowing all the answers can you live of faith. It is only by not knowing the way ahead can we journey in trust and that is what being a pilgrim is all about. It is about a present & future hope in the mysterious and miraculous God.

You would think that witnessing a miracle would make faith easier. That is not the outcome of the miracle of the feeding of the 5000. Jesus says, "*I am the bread of life*". He is asking the crowd to look beyond the miracle and look at him. And what did they do, they grumbled, just as the people of Israel grumbled to Moses in the desert, your Joseph's son, we know your parents, so what is this nonsense about you coming down from heaven! Some of the crowd may have been brought up with Jesus, and

even if he was not one of the lads, they failed to see beyond the obvious to what was actually real.

Jesus knew what was going on. He was fully aware of their misunderstandings. You can't come to God on your own he says; to understand, God draws people to himself. The big failure in the crowd's response to the miracle was to see the event and not see God who was in Jesus. It seems he was the last place they thought of looking!

I wonder what Jesus was thinking. He makes some very obvious statements; 'I have been sent by God, I have seen God, I am the living bread...', 'hitting' and 'head' and 'brick wall' come to mind. He has another go, yes the miracle of the manna in the desert fed your ancestors needs, but they ultimately died. Look beyond the obvious and see your needs being met by the living bread, bread that must be broken before it is available for all. You could almost imagine him pointing to himself as he speaks, but again they fail to understand. So you are giving us flesh to eat now!

There are two overlapping layers that keep missing each other here. For the crowd it is all about the miracle, their

needs and this life; for Jesus is about the person, their spiritual needs and eternity.

Let's not condemn the crowd too much, we often do exactly the same, we 'miss' God and see only our priorities, our values and when we want things done. If Jesus was frustrated with the crowd, and he was there physically in their midst, God gives us his Spirit to play exactly the same role.

By the Spirit of God, Jesus stands before us and becomes the face of God that we cannot miss, that concrete human being of 2000 years ago who challenges us to love neighbour as well as loving God and ourselves.

The miracle and the mysterious still have a very real role to play in our Christian lives, but they always point to the person and away from the miracle itself.

So, if God slips in a few miracles into our lives, be thankful for them and may we see beyond the obvious and the mysterious to the person of Christ. Amen.