

“This is Not the Miracle You Were Looking For”

John 14:23-31

What we hear in our Gospel reading is Jesus' answer to a question from the disciple Judas, not Judas Iscariot, but Judas son of James. The scene is the upper room, and Jesus has been speaking very plainly about who He is, His relationship with the Father in heaven and the Holy Spirit who was the Helper, the Comforter, the Counselor who was to come. We celebrate His coming on this feast of Pentecost.

Judas asks a question that is one which must have occurred to many, if not all, of the disciples. Judas asks, “Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself (that is, show yourself) to us, and not to the world?” They must have been thinking, if only Jesus would perform miracles and speak clearly about being the Son of God to everybody, and allow everybody the intimate contact the disciples had, then everybody would believe.

We could say, if Jesus would come and perform miracles and personally preach from this pulpit, everyone would come to Our Redeemer and come to faith and all would be good and right in the world. Instead, your stuck with me. I can only bring you the Word of God and the body and blood of Christ and baptize babies.

If only Christ would teach and perform miracles for everybody the way

He did for the disciples, then all the world would have to believe and love God.

Jesus dispels that notion. Miracles and direct, tangible contact with God as seen throughout the Old and New Testament would often strike fear in the hearts of the people, or cause bewilderment, but very infrequently would love be the end result. The Bible is littered with examples of people who had miraculous signs and wonders appear before their eyes, and they still wanted nothing to do with the Lord.

As Judas son of James is asking his question, the other Judas, who spent three years in the company of Christ, hearing His words, witnessing His miracles – He, at that very moment, is carrying out his plot to betray Jesus.

No sign or wonder will bring forth life and faith in a heart that the Holy Spirit has not first cultivated with the Word of God in love. Faith is the result of a miracle from God. The miracle is that God the Holy Spirit creates faith and creates life in our dead, sinful hearts. In Baptism, we witness the miracle of life.

On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit manifests Himself, causes miraculous events to occur, and the crowd was bewildered and perplexed asking, “What does this mean?” And others in the crowd were mocking the disciples saying that they must be drunk.

It was not until Peter proclaimed the Good News of salvation in the preaching of the Gospel that any in the crowd came to faith. And we read

later, on that day, 3000 came to faith and were baptized after hearing Peter preach about Jesus' death and resurrection. Preaching about the crucified and risen Christ and administering and receiving the Sacraments is life-changing.

We heard last week that after three years of healing people and performing numerous miracles, Jesus had a following of 120 people. Peter preaches one sermon about Jesus' death and resurrection, 3000 come to faith.

Our sinful nature claims, makes us think, that we need to see the spectacular. What is more spectacular than the miracle we partake of as we eat the actual flesh and drink the actual blood of the crucified and risen Son of God. This miracle people want to dismiss as being something not worthy of their attention. Even the miracle of coming to faith, so many want to attribute to someone other than the Holy Spirit – as if we go out and “find Jesus”, as if by my own reason or strength I believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him.

There is no sure-fire recipe for convincing someone of the truth of the Gospel. Brothers and sisters raised in the same household may have very different views of God in their adult years. It is like in the parable of the sower. The seed of the Word of God is always good seed. But sometimes it gets choked out by the world, or snatched away by Satan, or springs up quickly but has no root.

The people throughout history who have been awed or wowed by

miracles and direct revelation but had no love for God were like those from the parable who had no root, no depth to their faith. In His answer to Judas' question, Jesus is basically telling them that the "shock and awe" approach to evangelism is not the way to go. It will not work long term. Faith happens when God cultivates love in your heart, plants the seed of the Word, and then makes His home with you. Jesus says, "If anyone loves me, he will keep My word." And the Holy Spirit "will teach you all things and bring to remembrance all that I have said to you."

Now Pentecost was "shock and awe". But that was not the long term program. The Gospel is best spread one person to another. That is how the Holy Spirit works. The people on Pentecost didn't come to faith until they heard the Gospel. Until then, they were just confused. It is not anything you have done or the result of my or any pastor's clever promotional campaign that brought you here today. This is God's work in us as He allows His Word of grace and the light of truth to find its way through the darkness of our sinful hearts.

As you have come here today and gathered in God's house around God's Word and Sacraments, this is no small thing. This is the miracle. This is not the miracle your sinful nature was looking for. This is the miracle your sinful nature needs. This, right here, is how Christ our Lord manifests Himself to us. This is how He makes Himself known to us and to the world. Amen.