

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 13)
18th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Matthew 14:13-21
August 2, 2026

When I was 12, I embarked upon a rite of passage: I joined the confirmation class. Known for “loving God with our minds,” confirmands in my church were assigned “term papers” on biblical stories. My story was about the miracle of the loaves and fishes.

This was way before the internet, so I went to the church library and pulled down all the commentaries on this story in each of the Gospels. If I close my eyes, I can still smell the pages of those ancient, neglected books. Soon armed with the accumulated wisdom of exegetes who had gone before me, I confidently set out to dispel the mystery of this miracle.

After considering a few different scenarios, I proposed that when Jesus took a loaf of bread, broke it and distributed it, he opened the floodgates of generosity hiding in the gathered crowd. Everyone quit hoarding their lunchboxes, and, miracle of miracles, there was more than enough food because they pooled their resources.

I have always been something of a pragmatist, so even as a 12-year-old, I knew there had to be a logical explanation. My faith was not seeking understanding. Rather, my mind was determined to find a plausible explanation for the

supposedly miraculous multiplication of food. What better solution than sharing?

When I got my term paper back, our pastor had written in the margins that this was a perfectly plausible possibility, but he hoped I would at least consider the possibility of a miracle.

For any of us with a scientific bent to our ways of knowing, miracles strain at the bounds of credulity. We are trained to look at facts empirically and arrive at the kind of truth that can be tested. The word “miraculous” enters our vocabulary only when a conclusion appears to be in opposition to the facts at hand.

That would not have been the case for our pre-scientific forebears. For the ancients, all of life was a miracle. If it rained, it was because God sent the rain in answer to prayer. We instead put our trust in meteorologists who analyze atmospheric conditions and offer educated guesses about impending storm systems.

Likewise, with illness and healing, we know certain medical protocols can be used to combat life-threatening diseases and, under the right circumstances, they work. The ancients would have seen the entire art of healing as God’s activity.

They had a miraculous worldview. We have a decidedly non-miraculous one.

While we are inclined to use the word “miracle” when things work out unexpectedly, the ancients expected the miraculous. They understood that everything in life happens within the constant care of God.

If the whole world exists within the constant care of God, then contraband lunchboxes are not needed to explain the multiplication of loaves and fishes. God’s providence, God’s providing, is explanation enough.

We lost something when we ceased seeing the world as a miracle, but the story of loaves and fishes multiplied can still turn us Godward.

When we look at the world through the lens of a miracle, our seeing is transfigured. There’s a fundamental reorientation of life that comes from being able to see God’s providing activity in the day-to-day.

This view of the world takes cultivation. We, after all, have centuries of conditioning that causes us to think every mystery is ours to dispel. What if, instead, we relinquished control and received the world as an inexplicable gift given to us by God’s grace?

Our track record for holding a miraculous worldview in tension with the facts as we know them isn’t great. But if we are those whose faith seeks understanding, we must. It is vitally important for us to remember that God made physics as well as rainbows. Perhaps it is equally

important to remember that while physics can explain the rainbow, it can never explain why, in the gift of God's abundance, creation is beautiful.

When we behold the world as upheld, directed and governed by God's providence, we are given a transfigured reality in which miracle and everyday life are the same. When that happens, the way is opened for us to live our lives with a theology of gratitude and abundance.

In difficult times, we need both because gratitude and abundance stand in opposition to a theology of skepticism and scarcity.

A theology of abundance receives the gifts that God has given us – the whole width and depth of creation – and, with Jesus, looks up to heaven, giving thanks and then declaring, “Wow, look what God has given us; what can we do with it?”

And if Jesus' distribution of the loaves and fishes did just open the floodgates of generosity of some contraband lunchboxes, would that be any less miraculous?

Questions for reflection on Matthew 14:13-21

1. Can you remember a time when you encountered something you could only consider miraculous?
2. How can we cultivate a faith that believes in the abundance of God?
3. What would you tell someone who comes to the miracles of Jesus as a doubter?