

The Miracles and the Parables

The Cure of the Deaf and Dumb (Mark 1:31–37)

The miracle of the cure of the deaf-and-dumb man is insignificant compared to what God does every day. For every day children are born who previously had neither ears nor tongues, nor indeed even a soul. In less than a year they are furnished with soul, body, tongue, and everything else. But this miracle is so common that no one pays any attention to it. Scarcely anyone in the world ever says thank you to God for his tongue and his ears. How many are there who having enjoyed good sight for fifty years ever give God thanks with all their hearts? How many rejoice over so great a miracle? They marvel that Christ healed this man, but not that they themselves are able to hear. By this little miracle God stirs us up to recognize the great miracles. The whole world is deaf not to hear this. Pythagoras was considered a heretic because he heard the wonderful song of the stars. But one who is not blind will see the heavens so wondrous that one could die for very joy over the sight. If we had eyes and ears, we would be able to see and hear what the wheat says to us: "Rejoice in God, eat and drink, use me and serve your neighbor. Soon I will fill the barns." If I were not deaf, I would hear what the cows say: "Be glad, we bring butter and cheese. Eat and drink and give to others." So the hens say, "We lay eggs for you." And the birds,

“Be joyful, we are hatching chicks.” And the sows grunt for joy because they bring pork and sausages. So speak all the animals to us, and everyone should say, “I will use what God has given, and I will give to others.”

But as Christ effected this cure he sighed because he knew that as soon as the man’s tongue was restored he would misuse it.

The Widow’s Son (Luke 7:11–17)

The widow would not have so appreciated God’s work if she had not first been in anguish. So it is in life. If God did not let the sun rise for two days, what an outcry there would be! In order that we may appreciate his benefits, he suffers us first to be deprived of everything.

This woman saw only that her son was dead. No one discovered any sign that he would ever speak again. Therefore faith resides in those things which neither reason nor flesh nor feeling can see. Someday we shall feel, but now the old Adam is so blind that when he is in penury he does not see how he can be helped, nor when in torment of conscience how he can be comforted. So this widow saw not that Christ was the one who would help her. That is why Paul says that God does for us more than we can ask or think. (Eph. 3:20.) And again, “The Spirit helps our infirmities: for we know not for what we should pray.” (Rom. 8:26.) When a man truly prays, there is something higher in him, so that he does not know how much he should ask nor how much God will give him. This woman was so dejected that she longed indeed to have her son back but did not dare ask it because her doubt was mightier. Thus we see how deeply God peers into our hearts.

Christ perceives the longing and does not ask about the words in the mouth. He hears only the cry of the heart, and such a cry breaks through the heavens and the clouds and will be heard. God does not look at what we ask. We ask for some little thing, and he says: “That is far too small. I’ll give you something else that is far greater than you yourself.” So in doubt and death he gives me greater things than I know and see. Then I say, “Yes, I wanted it,

but I did not know I should ask for it.” This woman saw only her heart’s sorrow. Then God gave her more and deeper things than she understood.

That her son was dead was plain, and the life in which she must believe was nothing and yet must be something. Such must be the thoughts and the faith of every Christian in all things that touch life. He must say, “I know that it is, although I see nothing.” This is a great art in which I am only a pupil.

Our whole life is comprised in this same word. We have indeed Christ; we have eternal life, eternal justification, health, and comfort, and where are they? We see them not; they are not in a drawer, in the hands, but just in the Word. So God encompasses his doing in nothing. That is why you cannot tell a Christian by looking at him, because he can be recognized only by his speech, for Christ himself said, a Christian is like the wind. One hears the sound thereof, “but whence it comes and whither it goes, one knows not.” If one touches with the hand, it is not there. So is it with the Christian. I cannot recognize him because he is learned, rich, or wise, but only when through the rushing of the wind I perceive that he has the Word. He who would be a genuine Christian must be able to say that he has and believes in God, who can count out money from a naked purse and pour a drink from an empty cup.

So it was at the recent Reichstag. There were two gods there, God and the devil with all his wiles. But the Word stood, and we with the Word, and that’s enough and more than ten Turkish kaisers. The lack is only in us to fathom the grace we have been given. Let us hold fast to this—that it is God’s Word for which we fought and put ourselves in danger. Our opponents had to confess that our teaching is right and good.

Let us then rise toward God and desire those things which are not, as this mother had no son but would have him out of nothing. So when I die, I go into nothingness. I see nothing. I feel nothing. Then first God is known and herein I know what he is, namely, he that makes something to be out of nothing. About me is darkness. He says, “Let there be light and life,” and out of nothing it is so. Thus from death I am made to be life.

The Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes (Mark 6:30–44)

Reason says that loaves cannot be multiplied. It is something great when a man believes what he does not see. If one believes in Christ, the impossible becomes the possible. It is so when we



are in danger of death, and the Christian says, “It is impossible that I should remain alive, but I believe.” He breaks through the impossible and says it is possible. Similarly when a man feels the sting of sin, reason says: “You are lost. You have sinned. Who can make sin to be not sin?” But a Christian goes farther and says, “Although sin is here and no one can make sin to be not sin, nevertheless I will break through and claim that there is no sin in me.” The Christian is a giant who puts through impossibilities. But where are such people?

Yet in the last five or six years [prior to 1528] our cause has gone farther than reason would have believed. It seemed impossible that we should be so long in peace. Our enemies are too many to

count—the rabble, the princes, the bishops. If anybody had told the emperor and kings six years ago that today we would still be preaching, they would have bet their crowns against it. So it is in all things. A Christian must do the impossible, make a just man out of a sinner, devour death, and swallow the devil.

[But to get back to the loaves.] Christ tells us to pray for our daily bread. He gives greater honor to bread than to gold or silver. Bread, not gold, rejoices the heart of man. Reason says, “If I have gold, I’ll have enough to eat”; but Christ takes the meanest thing and gives it honor, “How many loaves have you?” he asks. They said, “Five loaves and two fishes.” Now fish is the lowest form of meat. See how he glorifies bread with a miracle and fish too, as if he would say: “You should not scramble after goods and gold. How would it help you to have a whole temple full of Hungarian gulden?” If you had no bread, you would give all the money for a single slice. If you have nothing to eat, don’t blame bread, but your own lack of faith. He who believes will have enough. Christ is the best baker. Believe on him, and you will have a baker who before you ask him starts baking bread.

And remember that farmers, millers, and bakers are the fingers of Christ.

In the last six years, I have seen many a man suffering from hunger who in the end was fed.

The guilds are so worried lest they have not enough to eat that they will not admit to membership a man of illegitimate birth. But is the man to blame that he was born out of wedlock? Is that any reason that he should not be a shoemaker? Must he expiate the sins of his father? Is he not as much created as you? Does he not have the same God and Father as you? “Brother” you should call him and he you because he is baptized. You say that your practice is the custom of the country, but God lets grain grow for the man whom you despise quite as much as for you. Suppose there should be more people at work, the work could be better done. One should not ask how many people there are. Just see how many there are in this town, and yet all have enough. Even if it were the custom of one hundred thousand cities to behave as you do, it would not be right.

[From another sermon on the same theme.] Christ can increase the bread in the house when you do not know how it happens. I notice it. I know that I spend more than I have. It is the same with a day laborer. He has children, and he does not see how he will be able to pay the rent. How does he manage it? The Lord once more works this miracle. Constantly he feeds us. This is nothing compared to the miracle which the farmer sees before his eyes. He works over his field and throws out a handful of seed and then a sprout comes up and bears ears full of grain. Out of the sand, wheat grows. [*Wittenberg* means the white hillock, so named because built on a mound of sand.] This is as much a miracle as making grain grow from a rock.

The whole land and the whole world are full of such miracles, but because the occurrence is daily and all men enjoy bread no one pays any attention. The miracle of the multiplication of the five loaves was really nothing compared to making bread out of stony ground, because making loaves out of a loaf already made of barley is not as much as to get bread from rocks. The seed has to lose its being and become a different creature by bringing from the earth a stalk for our comfort that we may see how good God is to us. But all this does not help because it is too common.

Look at your body. In three hours, bread is converted into flesh and blood. Do you think the heat of your stomach does it? There is a great deal more heat in an oven than in you. What then turns bread into flesh and blood? Nothing other than the Word of God. See then that bread comes not from the field but from the hand of the Lord. Even if there were no bread, we should not die of hunger, because the body is sustained by the Word. . . . God has also given us cows and sheep for milk and wool.

The Cure of the Nobleman's Son (John 4:46–54)

The nobleman might have hesitated to approach Christ. He might have said: "He won't hear me. He will snub me." Had he taken this attitude he would have been lost, but because he put behind him such thoughts Christ said, "Thy son liveth." Such is the nature of faith. That was what Paul had in mind when he said, "We reflect