



WESTMINSTER  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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**Rooted**  
Jason Freyer

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I can't believe that some places are actually already getting into their back to school sales! I feel like just a few weeks ago I pushed away from the desk in our basement, having spent 5 or so hours typing the last of my finals. Now I have to buy things to go back? I don't know if I'm ready yet!

But I suppose that all this talk about school has gotten into my head. I haven't always been the best student. Actually, I completely and totally blame my wife for making me a decent student at the seminary. She keeps me on the ball! But lately, at least three times in the last month, I have had the same dream. I am back at school, and I have skipped three weeks worth of Greek classes. Even in my dreams, I suppose I know that this is a class to be avoided! In my dream, I'm talking to people who are in the class, trying to figure out how I'm going to catch up with the mountain of work that has collected for me. And it's usually around then that I wake up. But this is one of those dreams that when you first wake up, you aren't sure what's dream and what's reality. So for a while in the morning I will lay in bed and try to figure out how I'm going to throw that Hail Mary pass, somehow convince the professor that he should welcome me back, and somehow get my work done and on time.

I wake up needing a miracle.

Now eventually I'll come to my senses and realize that I haven't actually committed this class cutting sin yet. But all the same it makes me wonder about the nature of miracles in our world. Some of us are deeply familiar with praying for a miracle. In my tribe of High School students, I can't tell you how many students pray for the miracle of God's voice or vision for their future. They wish and wish that God would just show up and tell them what to do. Of course we all know those who pray unending hours for miracles of medicine. When this disease or

that enters their body, and they need God to show up in a big way to help them heal.

Which is why I find it so surprising that folks seem so quick to explain away miracles. This story we read in John is a prime example. Jesus takes two fish and five loaves and feeds 5,000 men. Specifically men too, because apparently it was easier back then to count just the beards? If we add in a woman and child for each of the men represented, we end up at a crowd worthy of the seats in the Consol Energy Center. And enough of them had food from these two fish and five loaves that there were left overs. Some people read this story and want us to believe that Jesus was such a great public speaker, that he instilled enough generosity in the crowd that they were moved to act. Some would tell us that Jesus was inspirational enough that folks would open up the food they had with them and offer it to their neighbor.

I'm not sold.

When we start to explain away the miraculous, we find ourselves in familiar company.

Philip shows up and is the quintessential pessimist. There's no way we have enough food to feed all of these people! We could work for half a year and not be able to feed everyone here! There's no way!

Andrew follows right behind. I don't have much, but here's what I've got. I still don't think this is going to work, but I'm at least willing to give it a shot.

And then there's the character who frequently gets overlooked. A little boy, a child, shows up and offers up everything he has. Maybe he's so young he hasn't been told that this won't be enough, that the world doesn't work like this. Maybe he has

been told that and he's rebellious enough to not care. But even when teamed up with Andrew, the boy hits a brick wall. Everyone knows they want to solve the problem, but their pockets are empty. They are ill equipped for the job. They have nothing.

At this point, I imagine a little smile on Jesus' face. I imagine him thinking, "I've got them right where I want them."

Because anyone who spends time with this Jesus, who reads the scripture, who practices the faith, anyone who orbits the power of Christ knows that "Nothing is God's favorite material to work with."

Which brings us to Paul and trees. (I know you saw that transition coming a mile away!) If you were to count through the book of Ephesians the number of commands Paul gives in the first three chapters, you would arrive at zero. Not once in the first three chapters does Paul tell the church of Ephesus what to do. It does not read "If you do all of these things, then God will love you." Or "If you believe in just the right dogma God will grant you favor." It doesn't even read "As long as you make it to church every Sunday, Jesus will be on your side." There is no command at all in the first three chapters of Ephesians. Instead, he reminds them of the love of Jesus Christ.

And in fact at this climax, Paul tells us that we should at this point be rooted and established in this love. It should hold our feet to the ground. The love of Jesus should be the lens through which we see the world, through which we see each other, and the way we see ourselves. The point of everything according to Paul is the great surpassing love of Christ, who has poured his love into each one of us, and asked us to pour it in to others.

So why then is it that when it comes to miracles, we want to do all the heavy lifting? Why is it that we still try to explain miracles away, to make them rational, to bring God down to our level? Why is it that we seem to want to do the miracles for ourselves? It sounds like we know what God is up to in our heads, but we haven't quite yet let it come into our hearts. We haven't quite figured out yet that an offering as meager as two fish and five loaves can go immeasurably farther than we could imagine when we place them in the hands of Christ.

So how do we get to a place where we are rooted and established in love? First, we have to carry an awareness of our nothingness. This past week I had the pleasure of being the speaker at the New Wilmington Mission Conference. If you want to carry an awareness of your nothing-ness, speaking at a conference like that will do the trick. One speaker was a missionary in Israel. One speaker had been jailed for his faith countless times. One speaker was working to eradicate malaria. "And now, here's Jason Freyer!" To be honest, I felt small. But it helped me to remember that in my nothing-ness, even when I bring absolutely nothing to the table, Christ is hard at work in me. It's like Jesus told Paul in 2 Corinthians, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

Secondly, we have to carry an awareness of Christ's action in our lives. So many people I have talked to begin conversations about God's work in their lives by saying "I know this is going to sound crazy but..." The truth is if we affirm that Christ is alive and active in our worlds, it's not crazy when he interacts with us. It's reality.

There are miracles in the world. Some of them are in fact Red Sea splitting level miracles, when a loved one is healed or we hear from God directly or unexplainable grace finds its way to our door. But there are small miracles in our lives every day.

Reconnecting with a friend we haven't seen in a while can be a miracle. An embrace of reconciliation after hatred or heartbreak can be a miracle. And if you can't find anything else, in most kitchens in America there is a machine that dispenses glorious brown caffeinated liquid that I swear is a miracle each and every morning. The truth is Christ is alive and active in our world, and we would do well to pay attention to the moments of interaction in our lives.

And finally, we become rooted in love when we participate in God's action in the world. On my street about once a week I pass a father in his driveway washing the car with his young children. It should be clear that the kids are doing almost nothing to help the process. Really they are just squirting water on each other. The car is absolutely no cleaner as a result of them being there, and at the end of the day it is absolutely true that the father is still doing all of the work. But I bet if you asked that father, he would tell you that that time washing the car is one of the best parts of his week. I bet the presence of his children participating in that activity together is a blast. Sure they bring nothing to the table, but they join in any way to build relationship.

Friends, we serve a great God who is alive and well in our world, working miracles both big and small. And every day we are met with an outstretched hand in invitation to join God in the work he is doing in our world. We, even though we possess nothing more than a few fish and pieces of bread, are invited to participate in miracles.

Thanks be to God!





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