

For me, this morning's text recalls two things: a story and a tension.

Let's start with the story because stories are a whole more fun than tensions.

A couple of years ago, I bought Mary Allen the neatest book of children's Bible stories. She was captivated by nearly all the three dozen stories in this presentation. And I remember being a little surprised. Maybe it was because I'm familiar with the stories. Maybe it was because they were really simplified – only a few sentences and one or two pictures. And I was amazed at how well Mary Allen could imagine the stories with so little prompting. She connected immediately with Jonah. Who wouldn't laugh a fish that says, "gulp." She was SO proud of Miriam. What big sister wouldn't relate to saving a baby sibling? And she shook her head at those "naughty" disciples (her description!) who kept shooing away the children from Jesus.

But her favorite, her absolute favorite story, was the retelling of Jesus walking out toward the disciples on the Sea of Galilee. "They thought Jesus was a ghost!" the book said. I'd hardly gotten the words out of my mouth when Mary Allen squealed with delight. "A ghost!" she said. "How in the world would those silly disciples think he was a ghost? A ghost? Read it again, Daddy!" And so it went for nearly a month of reading those stories at bedtime. An aside: I'd give you every dollar I own to hear that squeal again.

At the time, I remember remarking to Susan Phillips about the experience. "Isn't it interesting," I said, "That this would be the story that she wanted to read over and over again?" I think I was impressed by the simplicity of it all. And I remember Susan commenting about the joy of how timeless so many of our faith stories are, and the even bigger joy in seeing children connect to those stories in every generation.

But in engaging today's text, I feel I have severely underestimated and misrepresented the wisdom of Mary Allen, and so many bright and inquisitive children her age. Yes, this is a great story. And yes, she has a wonderful sense of humor, and especially an appreciation for physical comedy. But she wasn't laughing at the Scooby Doo-like yikes of ghostbusting disciples. For one, she's a very empathetic child. She wouldn't think someone being scared is funny. She's also very observant.

I flipped back through this book of Bible stories. Today's story resides in the last third of the book. That means Mary Allen had read/seen/processed at least two dozen stories about the ministry of Jesus. In all of them, Jesus acts as friend, and protector, and healer, and provider, and partner. By the time we get to the lake, Mary Allen knows what kind of person Jesus is. He's a buddy. And he may be a little silly, but he's also really, really safe. And I think she was laughing, because she wanted the disciples to know, "Hey, Jesus isn't coming to "get" you; Jesus is coming to help you, and to love you, and to remind you that God's got you."

What I mean to say is that Mary Allen's already in on the story. So...she squeals with delight in knowing the goodness and the wonder of the character. I'd liken it to her satisfaction of hearing the narrator spring to his feet in *Twas the Night Before Christmas* upon hearing St. Nicolas making all that clatter on the lawn. She's in on the good news, and she can't wait for them to figure it out, too.

And so this morning, when I hear the old, old story, I am delighted for any mechanism that better reveals the partnering spirit of Jesus, and the loving nature of God.

Okay, so that's the story. Here's the tension.

For close to the entirety of our humanity's existence, the heart has been the primary vehicle of human transcendence. The mystics come to mind – a channeling of art, and spiritualism, and empathy, and a kind of quirky-but-cozy energy elevating human performance and expression. It seems that the mystery of God was never, for the heart-minded transformers, an inhibitor/barrier to transcendence, but rather its catalyst. There was a kind of general acceptance that the limits of God were beyond humanity's complete understanding. The occasional inconsistency in natural order was seen as interesting and textured. But the feeling of God, the pursuit of God, the channeling of God still had the possibility to create a kind of ooey-gooeyness. God was not to be explained; God was to be experienced.

A quick aside. Read some mystic authors. (And no, listening to Madonna songs doesn't count!). Mystics offer good food for thought. Julian of Norwich is one I'll quote. If you like action-movie mystics, check out Joan of Arc. But back to Julian:

Love was without beginning, is, and shall be without ending.

My, how busy we become when we lose sight of how God loves us.

All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.

Bring it, Julian. All day, every day! The idea here, is not that we're taking God's love out for a test-drive, but rather God's love is taking us on a ride. The idea is that we let God's love sweep us away, and the rest is gonna fall into place.

Humanity has a whole history of heart-based transcendence.

And then, Sardis, the Enlightenment happens. And the mind becomes an equally powerful, and perhaps significantly more frequent vehicle of transcendence. We've come a long way since Leonardo and his flying machine. As a matter of fact, we can fly just about anywhere, and to be sure, we've gone a whole of lot of places. That is...as long as the mind doesn't get so heavy-handed in determining the limits of what God can do.

Now please don't misunderstand me. I am 100% pro-Science, pro-scholarship, pro-reason, etc. The pursuits of the mind have unquestionably enhanced humanity. But for far too long, and particularly in our current age of polarization, we tend to view heart and mind as competitors rather than partners. Our lives can be rooted in myth (not tall tales, but those mechanisms that help us express what we cannot fully explain). Or our lives can be rooted in truth (those things that we can objectively comprehend and document with certainty). Myth or Truth. But never, ever, we say, should we be rooted in both myth AND truth. We choose our favorite, and go about deconstructing what the other has constructed. And I have to tell you, I'm really weary of deconstruction, unless we're willing to do some reconstruction, too.

I realize I'm wandering around a little, maybe even ranting. Some of you might not be in the mood for historical commentary this morning. So let me get to my point. This is two weeks in a row we're reading texts with scenes and stories that could compete with any of the tales you might hear at a campfire. In last week's text, Jesus ascends a mountain, transfigures, receives his own visible aura, converses with supernatural versions of Moses and Elijah, and beams to the soundtrack of God's affirming voice. This week, Jesus defies gravity by walking on water. And oh by the way, in the scene immediately preceding today's lection, Jesus feeds thousands of people, and there wasn't a Bojangles in sight.

And I want to tell you, with every conviction, and with every ounce of my being, I believe that Jesus walked on water. I really do. I believe that, because I believe in the possibilities of God, especially those that are beyond my comprehension.

I also want to tell you, with every conviction, and with everyone ounce of my being, I do not believe that Jesus walked on water. I really don't. Because every piece of reasoned evidence available to our senses tells us that no human being, at least not without the aid of manufactured devices, can defy gravity, and walk on the surface of water for prolonged amounts of time and distance.

And here is the tension, and indeed the challenge, for the contemporary reader: why must we insist that it's the one or the other?

I say all of this, because this morning, I long to be swept away by the power of the story – I want to catch some glimpse of how Jesus may better reveal God's presence in our present. I want my heart and my mind to be partners in revealing God's partnership.

So...I came up with a theory – I doubt it's original, and it's certainly not vetted by the Academy's high standards, but I really don't care. What if these miracle stories are a lot like the parables that Jesus tells? Their deeper meaning, that is, the reason for their inclusion by the gospel authors, is not revealed in either carbon dating or literalism. But rather, the miracles stories are much more about God's response to the needs of God's people, and God's consistent and loving relationship with God's people.

You know what's a miracle, and not the good kind? We have every necessary resource to meet the basic needs of every person on this planet. We have enough food, and enough water, and enough stuff, and

enough heart matter, to take care of one another. And we choose not to. We do so because we believe systems are too overwhelming to change. And yet the collective destruction of systems is not caused by some supernatural phenomenon, but rather a billion acts of individual indifference gathered like raindrops.

A mere hours before Jesus appears on the sea, he enables the disciples to feed five thousand men, as well as the thousands of women and children the text fails to mention. We fed thirty last week. And to be fair, we did have the miracle of Amy Wiebke. But to feed such a mass of people, even with ample logistics and planning, would be a miracle. Jesus showed the disciples, and indeed all the people how to feed one another. Later that evening, the disciples, tired, weary, anxious, and overwhelmed, struggled to navigate choppy waters. Jesus joins them. Works with them. Rides it out with them. Offers a presence that helps restore the calm.

Today, and every day, ***Jesus reminds us we have all we need to be all we are called to be.*** We are enough. And collectively, we can feed one another, and share each other's burdens, and be each other's strength. I don't think the story asks us to believe that Jesus was a master caterer or a supernatural skier. I think the story asks us to believe that each one of us can feed a neighbor with a single meal, and defy gravity for a single step. And I think the story beckons us to remember that our collective acts of kindness will one day heal the destructive tendencies of systemic indifference. And most of all, I believe the stories tell us that Jesus is our forever partner in such an endeavor.

I thank Mary Allen for helping me to hear the story anew. I thank my mind for listening to my heart, and my heart for listening to my mind. And I thank my God for limitless possibilities that endure.

Amen.