

## Right in Front of Us

by Linda Rex

**August 6, 2023, Proper 13 / After Pentecost**—In C.S. Lewis' book "The Last Battle", there is a scene which profoundly pictures how we can have everything we've ever wanted right in front of us and still not see it. In this part of the story, the black dwarves are comfortably sitting in a lovely meadow in the new Narnia, and Aslan the lion has given them a great feast of tasty foods to enjoy.

Unfortunately, the black dwarves are blind to these heavenly realities. What is a lovely meadow in reality, to them is the filthy dirt floor of a smelly stable. The tasty treats they are enjoying to them are wisps of straw and grain, covered with animal waste. Even though there was enough food for them all to enjoy, the dwarves believed there wasn't enough, and soon were having a fight over who got what.

This picture of our inability to see what is right in front of us is the author's way of helping us to understand how we can be in the midst of God's kingdom even now, and yet be living as though we are still enslaved citizens of this earthly realm. Blind to the spiritual realities, we may live as though we are unloved, God-forsaken orphans who have to struggle to have the smallest blessing in this bleak, dark world, when in reality, through Christ, we have been included in God's inner life and love, and by the Spirit have all of heaven's blessings available to us.

In the New Testament reading for this Sunday, Romans 9:1-5, the apostle Paul spoke of some of his fellow Israelites as being in this place of blindness. Paul said he had "great sorrow and unceasing anguish" in his heart because he longed for them to see and understand all that Jesus Christ had done for them, but they refused to receive it. His concern was deep enough that he was even willing, if God had allowed him, to sacrifice his own inclusion in Christ's life so that they would recognize theirs. It broke Paul's heart that his people, the human lineage of Jesus, could not and would not embrace the truth which was so evident in Christ's life, death, resurrection and ascension.

The gospel story for today in Matthew 14:13-21 tells how Jesus was actively ministering to a crowd of over five thousand people, even though he had hoped for some time alone to deal with the loss of his relative John the Baptizer. His compassion moved him to offer healing to those in need, and the task was so large that as the day drew to a close, his work was not done. The disciples encouraged him to send the people away so they could get food for themselves. But Jesus told his disciples, "You feed them."

This was an interesting statement, because it was obvious to the disciples that this task was impossible. The disciples did happen to have five loaves and two fish, but to feed over five thousand people? The men were still in a space of blindness with regards to the spiritual realities. Even after all of their time with Jesus, and even after he had spent all day performing miracles, they couldn't imagine being able to feed the people with five loaves and two fish. The day was getting darker, the situation more serious, and Jesus was telling them it was up to them to solve this problem!

Going for a moment back to the passage in Romans 9:5, notice who Paul says Jesus is. He didn't say Jesus was a nice guy who helped people, healed the sick, and told good stories. What he said was, Jesus Christ was and is both fully human and fully God. The problem in dealing with feeding the large group of people was that the disciples still did not realize *who Jesus was*. This is the central spiritual reality we all need to embrace, for it makes a profound difference in how we deal with the everyday situations in our lives which seem to be beyond our ability to handle.

Notice the profound difference which occurred when the disciples placed their five loaves and two fish in Jesus' hands and then acted as though he could and would do what was needed in the situation. Jesus told them to organize the people—so they did. Jesus blessed the bread and broke it, and told them to share the food with others—so they did. When all was said and done, everyone had all they needed and there was even enough left over to fill twelve large baskets. Jesus told them not to neglect to gather the leftovers—so they did. Nothing was wasted, and all were fed.

The irony was that even after he did all this, the disciples still seemed to be blind as to *who Jesus was*. They needed their eyes opened and their hearts awakened. The spiritual realities are not something we touch, taste, feel, like our physical senses, so it seems at times that they are not real. But Jesus Christ is our living Lord, and he reveals himself to us by his Spirit. He loves to take what little we have and put it to work doing great things for his kingdom in this world. And he loves to include us in what he is doing even though at times it may not make sense to us.

In spite of how things may appear at the moment, God is present and at work in this world and in our lives through Jesus by his Spirit. Ask him to help you see the truth of what's really going on. Ask him to awaken you to the spiritual realities—and get ready for a challenging journey of discovery!

*Father, please awaken us by your Spirit to the spiritual realities we are included in. Enable us to see and know Jesus for who he really is, and to respond to him in faith, trusting him with all that we have in every situation. Grant us the grace to follow wherever he leads, and to do all that he asks of us, believing he will do more for us and in and through us by your Spirit than we could ever ask or imagine, for your glory. Amen.*

*"I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit—I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen." Romans 9:1–5 NIV*