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Recently I watched a film titled “Hidden Figures” released last year. I heard about it from Geoff and Carol and wanted to watch it, but totally forgot about it. Last week I happened to remember it and finally watched the film with my family. The story was awesome and inspirational, and gave me good food for thought.

The movie was based on the true story about three African-American women breaking the strong wall of racial and gender discrimination at NASA, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, in the United States in early 60’s. Katherine Johnson, Mary Jackson, and Dorothy Vaughan were the three women.

They were professionals in mathematics, engineering, and electronic computing each, but they were underestimated and discriminated against just because of their skin colour. However, they weren’t disappointed or devastated; they didn’t give up their dreams and tried to contribute to the space project as much as possible.

Their commitment and courage had changed the culture of NASA little by little, and on top of that their incredible works were indispensable in realising the space scheme of NASA in its early stage. Yes, they were hidden figures in the development of aerospace science and technology.

Furthermore, their achievements were also the source of hidden power for the American civil rights movement against racial segregation in 60’s. Mary Jackson became NASA’s and America’s first female African-American aeronautical engineer. Dorothy Vaughan became NASA’s first African-American supervisor.

Katherine Johnson went on to perform calculations for the Apollo 2 mission to the moon and the Space Shuttle. In 2016, NASA dedicated the Katherine G. Johnson Computational Building in honour of her ground-breaking work in space travel. She is still alive and will turn 99 year of age this month.

They all fought against racial discrimination and fought to advance women of all colours. In all the greatest breakthroughs in human history, there were hidden people contributing to movements or events like them. Those hidden stories help us find new meanings and get the whole picture.

[2]

What’s interesting is that we can also find those hidden figures in today’s Gospel reading. Today’s Gospel reading, Matthew 14:13-21, talks about the story when Jesus feeds the five thousand. This story is the only narrative of Jesus’ miracles that all the four books of the Gospel contain.

The storyline is simple. One day when Jesus proclaimed to the crowd the Good News of the Kingdom of God and healed their sick, it was getting dark. So, the disciples suggested Jesus to send them away to get some food because the place was remote and it’s already getting late. But, Jesus didn’t want to send the people away without feeding them.

However, there were only five loaves of bread and two fishes in their hands. Jesus took them and gave thanks to God, and then gave them to people. Surprisingly, about five thousand men ate them and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. What’s remarkable is that women and children weren’t included in the number of the crowd.

Almost everyone might hear of this story at least more than once. What have you felt or thought about this miracle? What impression did you have when you read or heard it for the first time? Some people would be impressed with Jesus’ miracle or his compassion toward the crowd, while others might think that it wasn’t real; for them it’s just a fiction symbolising the power of Jesus as the Son of God.

As I mentioned earlier, the narrative when Jesus feeds the five thousand is the only story of Jesus’ miracles recorded in all the four Gospels. It is a very surprising fact that there was only one event among lots of Jesus’ miracles that was considered significant enough by all the four writers to record in their books.

This fact reveals certainly how important today’s story is. Then, why did all the writers think it important? We can find the answer through hidden figures in the narrative.

[2]

The first hidden figure about whom I want to talk wasn’t recorded in the book of Matthew. The hidden person is related to the five loaves of bread and two

fishes that Jesus took at that time. The Apostle John mentioned about the situation in a bit more detail. John 6:8-9 say, “Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up, ‘Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?’”

Yes, the first hidden person we can find in the story is an anonymous boy who donated his food. We know that there were five thousand people not counting women and children. There might’ve been many people with some food for their dinner. We don’t know how long the disciples searched for some food from the crowd, but they could meet only one boy who willingly shared his food.

He had a small amount of food; it was like a drop in the ocean, but it became priming water for the abundant divine grace for the crowd. We don’t know what might have happened if the boy didn’t share his food; maybe the disciples could find other donors or Jesus wouldn’t have fed them at all.

Whatever it might be, the bottom line is that the divine miracles have always happened through our participation. Our faith and obedience look trivial and are easily covered with other things, but they are indispensable in God’s wonders among us.

[3]

The other hidden figure in today’s story is a group of people. They are the disciples of Jesus. In the narrative the disciples did lots of works. They got some food from the little boy, directed all the people to sit down in groups on the grass, took food from Jesus and distributed to the crowd. Lastly, they picked up the leftovers.

The reason that their role should be highlighted in the story is that the event was done for them. Of course the first purpose of the miracle was feeding the crowd. Jesus had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. But, at the same time, Jesus wanted to teach his disciples something important.

According to the Gospels, there were two critical things happened before the feeding miracle. One thing was that Jesus sent his disciples out two by two giving them authority over impure spirits. The other thing was that John the Baptist was beheaded by King Herod.

Through the amazing experiences that they had in preaching and driving out many demons, the disciples were delighted and confident. But at the news of John’s death they might have felt threatened and scared. In that situation, Jesus intentionally showed the miraculous sign to teach them three things about mission.

First, our mission should be done with strong faith in God and compassion towards people regardless of situations. Second, our primary role in mission is to distribute God’s words and works rather than making some wonderful things for ourselves. Finally, although Jesus’ feeding ministry was done, our role isn’t finished.

The twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish collected signify what the twelve disciples must achieve following their master’s footsteps; like Jesus, they were supposed to feed people with what they got from Christ.

Jesus was at the centre of this miraculous event, but there were those hidden figures cooperating with him.

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Sisters and brothers,

Every God’s missional wonders need hidden people of Godlike those in the story. Every moment God is looking for someone who willingly shares his or her gifts, wealth, or power like the little boy. Our God is looking for someone who distributes God’s wonders to family, friends, neighbours and even strangers like the disciples did.

Here and now, God is also calling us to fulfil our roles for him to transform our church and local community. If you feel touched or challenged, please proclaim as follows: “Here I am Lord; is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling in the night; I will go Lord, if you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart.” Amen.