

Miracles Happen
Is 35: 1-10; Mt 11: 2-11

If you'll set aside all of the miracles announced on the cover of Star magazine (available today at your local check out counter), one of the most profound of all was that of Kelly Barker. Kelly Barker was a woman who suffered severe brain damage in an automobile accident. Medical doctors believed she would be in a vegetative state for the rest of her life, but a few months later, Kelly was walking and talking. Of this unexplainable recovery, her neurologist said, "We have no real scientific explanation... There wasn't even a *question* of recovery. The question was: Do we maintain life or do we let nature take its course?"¹ (*This and other examples of miracles is found in a provocative book, Rational Conclusions, that Jim Quimby brought by my office the other day. He is gifting this book, authored by his dear friend, to our church library. You'll find it there today after worship.*)

Miracles happen. Yet many of us believe that what some might call miracles are really just exceptional natural occurrences that science will eventually explain. As a matter of fact, today's definition of miracle is that the event defies or violates a natural law. This creates a category that says that what's happened is odd and problematic, to be explained rather than celebrated... This also creates a category of Christians for whom anything that could be defined as miraculous becomes unnecessary literalism that would be probably more appropriately described in another way. Many miracle embracers believe that the rational among us are missing something grand, or at least less than faithful or less than God-fearing.

Those of us who are miracle embracers are ones for whom miracles are supernatural occurrences motivated by an all powerful God. Miracle embracers know that miracles happen because there is an omnipotent God who wants certain things to unfold in a certain way at a certain time. Like the ancient Israelites, and certainly like John and Jesus, they acknowledge as miraculous those transformative events that occur in the world around them. Miracle embracers believe that these events occur because of the force and intention of God's presence, purpose and power. We don't attempt to explain away or rationalize how or why something happens. We simply accept these happenings as "miracles" with what has been labeled "abiding astonishment."² Often, the rational people think the miracle embracers are delusional.

CS Lewis wrote in his essay, "Miracles," "... (most) people have an almost aesthetic dislike of miracles. Admitting that God can, they doubt if God would."³ In order to fully embrace the idea of miracles, most people feel a need to suspend disbelief, or is it, suspend belief in order that they might begin again to believe in the omnipotence of God. - a God who breaks through the suffering and sorrow and want of the world and satisfies it with perfect grace.

Lewis tells us that what we believe about miracles suggests a lot of what we believe about God. When we don't believe that something miraculous is possible, we don't unabashedly believe that God is capable of great things. In other words, we effectively put constraints around God.

¹ James Agresti, *Rational Conclusions*, (location not provided: Documentary Press, 2009). p. 43

² Martin Buber, *Moses, The Revelation and the Covenant*, pp 65-75

³ C.S. Lewis, "Miracles" found in *The Grand Miracle*, (NYC: Ballentine Books, 1970.) pp 1-13.

More explicitly, we put constraints around God as less than powerful. If we can allow ourselves to accept God's powerful truth that miracles do happen, then we need to confront the equally compelling truth that miracles happen in as many forms as there are people to experience them. For some, miracles are those providential break-throughs that happen in the nick of time, or at the perfect time. - Maybe what one would call a coincidence, or a God-incidence. "It's a miracle!" Becomes a kind of saying or response when we otherwise don't know what to think, feel or do, but we're eternally grateful, nonetheless. For others, miracles are a perfect enactment of the literal word of God: the lame walk; the deaf hear. But that leads us right up to the 10,000 pound elephant in the sanctuary. So I called BoJane (*It's ok. I told her I would tell you this.*). I asked her what she felt when she read texts like this - that the blind would see. Her response was what some of you might expect, "YIKES! That would be horrible! I don't want to see! That would scare me to death!" Well, that certainly diffused *my* anxiety and it should yours. Then she told me that when she reads about being in heaven where everyone will see, she gets really freaked out. "What if I see my parents for the first time and I don't like how they look?"

This leads us to two points. First, to a third category of believers: Those for whom miracles are metaphors. For BoJane, the blind see means those who have limited depth of understanding will be able to perceive or see what's deep inside, but not necessarily see with eyes. Her response was that this scripture wasn't meaning that the people without eyesight would see with their eyes. It meant for her that people would understand or see something more fully with their hearts. For these folks like BoJane miracles like the ones of which we read from scripture this morning are strong metaphors for a great unfolding in the world. But BoJane's self-revelation *also* told me that miracles are very personal. My definition isn't your definition, as we already talked about before. But also, my miracle isn't your miracle. You might not want my miracle or the miracle I would want for you to have. I would, of course, want BoJane to have eyesight. But BoJane has no desire to ever see with her eyes.

It is a point of *minor* importance that all people must adhere to one particular definition of miracle. It is a point of *paramount* importance that all people must believe with all of their heart and their might and their soul that our God of all creation is *capable* of and delivers miracles of every sort. Because it's true. Once we remove our constraint that there are no real miracles in the world today, we remove our constraint around God. God becomes even more potent in every aspect of our lives, enabling us to see in new ways, hear afresh, walk more boldly if not walk for the first time. God becomes more potent among us, incarnate in every way as the great I Am who comes again and again to save the world from all of its need. Central to our faith is that we live in a world where we believe that miracles happen"⁴

This is what enabled John the Baptist, sitting in a jail cell balancing his need for a miracle with his rock-solid faith in a God whose will must be done, to simply ask if Jesus was the one who is to come. This is what enables you and me, when *we're* needing a miracle in our own lives to embrace the miracles we see unfolding in other people's lives not being worried that the miracle they receive is in binary opposition or in offset to the one that we want for ourselves because that's just bad theology. But because every miracle affirms the truth of God's power to create great miracles all around, representing God's will unfolding even though it might take a great deal of patience interpretation or personal understanding to see. This is what encourages us to

⁴ *Dictionary of the OT Pentateuch*, 130-131.

hope for great things to happen for others – miraculous things - in spite of our own circumstances, not believing for an instant that God’s bucket of miracles ever runs out.

Miracles Happen. Our God is a God who parted the red sea and turned water into wine and raised the dead. Our God is a God who emptied himself, breaking all barriers of the natural and the supernatural, to become flesh among us in order to work more powerful miracles among us. Our God is “miracle-embodied,” preparing to come again to set all people free. If you don’t believe this to be true, then you might want to plan for Christmas to come a little later this year. Because if you don’t believe this to be true, this time of Advent, of preparation hasn’t served you well and you might want to start over. You clearly don’t believe in an all powerful God who came in the flesh a long time ago, let alone an all powerful God who will come again to save us all.

Miracles Happen.

Dare to believe in the greatness of our Lord, who comes and comes again in many miraculous ways to heal the great hurts of the world in as many ways as there is pain. Dare to believe in the greatness of our Lord who is coming again and again in many miraculous ways to save the suffering souls of the world in as many ways as there is suffering. Dare to believe in the greatness of our Lord who is coming and coming again as a miracle among us to be at one with us in our every day living – the joys & miseries of it all, who is coming and coming again as a miracle among us to be at one with others in their every day living, too.

May we allow ourselves to embrace this miracle Lord the Christ, incarnate and incarnating in as many ways as there are life experiences requiring of a miracle today. And may we always live in the joy of the one who comes to bring us hope and peace now and forevermore. Amen.