

All I Need is a Miracle

18 March 2007

Bible passage: **Luke 5:12-13** (*The Message*)

“One day in one of the villages there was a man covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him in prayer, and said, “If you want to, you can make me clean.”

Jesus put out his hand, touched him, and said, “I want to. Be clean. Then and there, his skin was smooth, the leprosy gone.”

Sermon Nugget: How can we understand the healings and wondrous acts that Jesus performed? Can we only believe if we see a miracle? Do miracles still happen? What constitutes a miracle?

A member of the Worship team shared a story the other night about his daughter’s sister-in-law. A few weeks ago, she packed up a U-Haul and moved from here to look for work in Denver. She had really felt that’s what she was supposed to be doing.

A couple of weeks after getting there, everything in her life seemed to be falling apart—her car, her computer, her cell phone, and she hadn’t yet found a job. She really began to wonder if moving had been the right thing after all. Frustrated, she got into her car, praying that it wouldn’t break down, and set out to find a place to spend some time alone with God.

Since she was new to Denver, she didn’t really know where she was going, so she just started driving. She passed one park after another, but they all seemed to be packed with people, or under construction, or had some other obstacle that made stopping there impossible. Finally, she pulled her car over to the side of the road, and said to God, “I just want to be alone! I want to find a place to sit with a view of the mountains, preferably in the sun so I don’t have to freeze!”

Determined to find a spot, she drove a couple more miles down the road, and came upon a park, and decided to turn in. As she drove down the narrow, twisting road, she noticed a bench in the distance. It was on top of a hill, and gleaming in a beam of sunlight. She knew that was where she was supposed to go, so she parked her car, and started walking, enjoying the sunshine, and filled with gratitude that God had granted her request.

As she got closer to the bench, she noticed that there was something engraved in it, and walking closer, she saw her own last name! Carved in to the cement seat were the words “In Honor of Bernie Schilt.” That last name is not all that common, so she was totally astounded. Not only had she been led to the perfect place to sit and be alone with God, but the bench even had her name on it!

It turns out that Bernie was her grandfather’s brother, and that he used to sit in that very spot for years after his retirement. Shortly after his death, his family decided to have his name engraved on the bench, and his great niece had found it!

Was this just a coincidence? Was it a miracle? Was it what a friend of mine refers to as a “God-cidence”? Just what was going on here?

I suspect most of us have heard the stories about some of the “miracles” that are proclaimed to have happened. I recall from

my days of teaching French that there is a stream in a cave near the town of Lourdes where people go to be healed.

The water there is pure, and contains some typical ingredients, but nothing thought to be especially therapeutic. However, people claim that the water can heal the sick, and today, many thousands of pilgrims visit Lourdes each year, and some claim that they have been miraculously healed.

There’s someone here at The Garden who had a scheduled procedure on her heart a few weeks ago. She had worn a monitor for a period of time, and the doctors were certain they knew what they were going to find. However, when they got in there—nothing. What they expected was not there, nor was anything else! They shook their heads, and said there was no medical explanation for it. It was a miracle!

I’m sure we’ve heard of things like that—when there is no obvious explanation. All we can think to say is “It’s a miracle!” Well, what are we talking about when we use the term “miracle?” Are there miracles today?

Our Bible passage is one of many we could have used this morning. It’s a story of Jesus healing someone. The story goes this way: **One day in one of the villages there was a man covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him in prayer, and said, “If you want to, you can make me clean.”**

Jesus put out his hand, touched him, and said, “I want to. Be clean. Then and there, his skin was smooth, the leprosy gone.”

What was going on there? Did Jesus really heal the man? What about all those stories we find in the Bible of his performing countless so-called miracles? Do we have to believe they actually happened if we want to call ourselves faithful people? If we don’t, then how do we explain the occurrences that are recorded there?

Perhaps it would be a good idea to start on the same page, by defining what we mean when we use the word “miracle.” According to Wikipedia, the Latin root of the word means “**something wonderful**,” and is considered an instance of divine intervention by God in which the ordinary course of nature is overruled, suspended, or modified in order for a beneficial event to occur.

Whatever the situation, God is understood as intervening in the laws of nature. In the Bible, for example, we have stories like Jesus turning the water into wine and the wedding in Cana. He turns a loaf of bread into many loaves of bread, and he brings people back to life—people who were considered to be dead.

If we read the Bible as fact, literally, those are claims that we find there. However, as many of you already know, we don’t encourage reading the Bible that way. So you might ask, how are we to understand all the stories of healings and miracles that are attributed to Jesus in the Bible?

I guess that the first thing I need to say is that I believe that God is capable of whatever is needed in any situation. So, I’m not saying that miracles are impossible, because I believe that, with God, all things *are* possible.

Having said that, however, I do have to tell you that I personally have never experienced the kind of thing—literally—that the Bible passage talks about. There are many mysteries that we encounter in life, and I certainly don't profess to know the answers to them. I don't preclude their being of God, but I don't assume that's the case either.

I also have to say that personally, I don't need miracles of the supernatural sort to know that God exists, or that my faith is real. While there are those who will only believe if the miraculous, and almost unbelievable, happens, I don't happen to be one of them.

One of the reasons I fall in that camp has to do with my understanding of who God is and what God is like. Frankly, I'd have a hard time trusting a God who performs miracles for some, but not all—a God who's somewhat capricious about who is healed and who isn't. It would be chaotic to live in a universe where the laws of nature didn't exist, and we were constantly dealing with randomness. That kind of selective intervention just simply doesn't compute with my understanding of what God is like.

So, am I saying there is no such thing as a miracle today, and that the stories that are told about Jesus are lies? Not at all. Let's talk about another way to look at things by exploring the Bible story we have for today. Here's a man who's suffering from leprosy who comes to Jesus, hopeful that he can be healed, and he is. How does that happen? In the story, we read, **Jesus put out his hand, touched him, and said, "I want to. Be clean."**

There seem to be several things going on here—things that can provide a form of healing. One of those things is the word of hope that Jesus offers. Jesus assures the leper that he wants to heal him. Right away, that gives the man some hope and encouragement, and hope is invaluable when it comes to healing by any definition of the word. Dr. Rachel Remen has said, **"Healing is different from curing. Healing is a process we're all involved in all the time...Healing is the leading forth of wholeness in people."**

Jesus offered a word of hope to the leper, and that is just what many of us need to heal physically, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually. That's because hope gives us a very different outlook on things. That word of hope opened the door for healing.

I believe there's another powerful tool for healing at work in that story, too. We read, **"Jesus touched him."** We need to understand that those who had leprosy were considered "untouchables," and they simply did not come into contact with anyone who did not have the disease.

We still see things like that today when we go out of our way to avoid those who are hurting, because we feel uncomfortable. The last thing many of us are interested in is touching someone with any kind of a disease! Can you imagine how the leper felt when Jesus not only had him come close to him, but reached out and touched him!

Touch is powerful! You know of course, that I'm talking about touch that is loving and caring, not in any way violent or harsh.

I'm sure we've probably all heard stories about children who don't develop properly when they're deprived of human touch. I read recently that many of the children who survived the tsunami physically had severe emotional scars from the trauma. Those who are working with them have begun to see healing as a result of their being hugged and touched in a loving, comforting way.

Michael Rayel, a psychiatrist, author and game inventor, tells about the conviction he's held since high of the power of a touch. He wrote, **"It is the magic of a touch, the power of hug...that makes life joyful."**

One of the experiences he cites as a reason for this conviction was that of taming a wild cat who became his loyal pet. His grandmother had told him that the only way to tame such a wild animal was to rub its forehead several times, and so he gave it a try with an untamed cat that the family brought home. Slowly but surely, the cat started to respond to his care, to his touch, and eventually became a loving pet that would run to meet him when he came home from school.

Rayel goes on to talk about the physical and psychological benefits of touch. Touch releases endorphins into the body, making the body less prone to stress. Touch provides comfort when we're lost or grieving; it offers us a sense of security. And, Rayel says, **"Like the Internet, it allows high-speed access to another soul."**

Most of us probably know what it's like when we feel down, discouraged, disheartened, and someone gives us a hug of encouragement. It changes everything, and although most of us fail to acknowledge it, knowing that someone cares and reaches out to touch us is really a miracle—the kind of healing miracle the man with leprosy received.

When it comes to miracles, I'm at the point of believing that a miracle doesn't have so much to do with a supernatural event, but rather with the very nature of life itself. If we look at things differently, we can see everything as a miracle. Being born is a miracle; every cell in our body is a miraculous creation; every breath we breathe is a miracle.

Learning to share our time is really a miracle in a world that seems to be filled with greed and selfishness. Love in the face of hate is a miracle. Watching the leaves start to bud out in the spring is a miracle. Seeing the sunrise in the mornings is a miracle. Even though we tend to take these things for granted, if we look around us, we can see miracles everywhere we turn. Are they supernatural events? Really seeing them certainly is.

Closing:

An unknown person once said, **"People usually consider walking on water or in thin air a miracle. But I think the real miracle is not to walk either on water or in thin air, but to walk on earth. Every day we are engaged in a miracle which we don't even recognize: a blue sky, white clouds, green leaves, the black curious eyes of a child—our own two eyes. All is a miracle."**

I agree. We don't really need another miracle. We already have plenty of them.

Have a great Sunday and go in peace. Amen.