



Round Hill Community Church

Sermon: June 28, 2009

Do Miracles Happen?, The Rev. Anita E. Keire

Mark 5:21-43

Do miracles happen? Did they happen during biblical times? Most people of faith believe in miracles. Skeptics or doubters say there are no miracles. Skeptics say that since miracles are not repeatable and cannot be scientifically observed that they did not or do not happen.

A belief in miracles depends on your understanding of who God is. If you believe God is the creator of the universe and that God exists and is loving and almighty, you probably believe in God's miracles. If you do not believe in God or think God is limited, then you probably believe God is not in control and miracles do not happen.

As a Christian, I believe the universe is dependent on God yet the universe is semi-autonomous because God has put into motion natural processes or natural laws of nature such as the moon's effect on the ebb and flow of tides. Generally speaking God upholds these natural laws, but God is not bound by them. God can and does act outside the natural law God put in process.

Miracles disclose God's presence, activity, and grace. Miracles require in the recipients a receptivity to and belief in God.

We have two miracles in today's scripture reading. We have a healing miracle in which a physical affliction is healed. The second miracle overcomes the laws of nature with the raising of the dead.

Jairus, a leader in the synagogue, falls at Jesus' feet and repeatedly begs Jesus to come and lay his hands on his dying daughter to restore her to health. On the way to Jairus' home, Jesus is interrupted by a woman with a 12-year history of hemorrhages. She is another desperate person in need of Jesus' miraculous powers. She believes Jesus can cure her. You could say that she steals a healing by touching Jesus' garments. By Jewish law, she is an untouchable, an unclean person. She is treated like a leper. She is cut off from society and the synagogue. Yet Jesus takes time to speak to her. He listens to her story, and then tells her that her faith has healed her. By that, Jesus means that she is not only healed physically, but she has been made spiritually whole as well. Jesus gives her a new lease on life.

In the meantime, Jairus' helplessness and agitation increases with this interruption. His daughter is dying. There is no time to waste. While Jesus is talking to the woman, people from his home come and tell him that his daughter is dead. Jairus' desperate hope turns to hopelessness. Yet Jesus tells Jairus that his daughter is not dead, that she is asleep. Jesus says, "Do not fear, only believe." Only believe? What would you have done if you were Jairus? Most people believe a dead child is dead and cannot be revived. Would you believe or despair? Jairus chooses to believe and places all his faith and hope in Jesus. Jesus raises Jairus' daughter from the dead. Peter, James, John, Jairus and his wife witness this miracle. Yet Jesus strictly ordered them to silence. Why? Perhaps Jesus wants everyone to assume the girl was asleep. Jesus doesn't want to be known as some sort of magician who can bring the dead back to life.

These two miracles of Jesus' healing the woman with the hemorrhages and the raising of Jairus' daughter tell us many things about Jesus? We learn that Jesus is on his own timetable and is not bound by our limita-

tions, pleadings or status in life. Yet through our faith and trust in Jesus, miracles lead to the ultimate health cure which is spiritual. Also, Jairus' daughter's restoration prefigures Jesus' resurrection. She will live a certain span of years before she dies. But because of Jesus, we know her resurrection as well as our own will bring eternal life and victory over the power of death.

Today, explaining Jesus' miracles and miracles in general present a challenge for the contemporary Christian church. The word "miracle" has a lot of magical baggage attached to it. Part of the problem may be that people do not know how to articulate how a particular miracle occurred.

Miracles are reported to occur occasionally at Lourdes in France and other places. Scientifically we cannot explain how they happen. Theologically there is just as much ambiguity. Rather than ignore events called miracles, let us try to understand them as best we can. We need to understand miracles in terms of the world we know and experience daily. We simply do not know what happens in events called miracles. Healthy skepticism is good if it makes us think beyond the obvious and if it makes us aware of the ambiguity present in all miracles. Perhaps the word "miracle" should be changed to "a transformation." Certainly people feel restored in God's presence and look at the result of a particular event or transformation as God's manifestation to them.

The underground spring in the grotto at Lourdes is claimed to have miraculous qualities for which it is famous. Millions of people have made a pilgrimage to Lourdes. People claim miracles do occur there. But it seems to me that the miracle comes not from the water but from the openness and receptiveness of the believer to God. The believer opens his or her heart to God. The preparation for, the anticipation of, and the actual participation in this pilgrimage have caused the believer to focus solely on God. For many, every single step up the mountain in communion with thousands of other believers creates a sense of awe, wonder, and an awareness of the presence of God. When the believer experiences God, the believer realizes his or her finiteness and humanness before God. The believer then confesses and repents of past sins. God often bestows grace on the believer and the miracles that occur are God's revelation or manifestation to those who are at that moment in a unique communion with God. Other people not experiencing God's presence at that moment may disbelieve a particular event is a miracle. People's faith, openness, and receptiveness to God determine how they perceive events in this world. God is always in our presence even though at any given moment God may seem very far away.

Often we do not accept or recognize the form of God's decision in a miracle. We have automatically come to expect a physical, visible cure of what ails us. Jesus did not only cure the woman's hemorrhaging, but he cured her spiritually as well. Thereby suggesting to us that God performs restorative transformations on the human psyche and soul as well as on the human's physical being. Or, even more radically, sometimes God may perform miracles on the human psyche alone and may allow the physical ailment to remain.

Let me give you an example of what I consider to be a miracle of this kind, a miracle of transforming a person's psyche without curing the physical ailment. Almost 30 years ago, I was Director of Christian Education at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Riverside. In the Sunday school there was a beautiful fourth grade girl, called Tasha, who was deaf. Her speech utterances were not very distinct. Her parents were going through a bitter divorce which she could not understand in her silent world.

Each year the Sunday school would put on a Christmas play addressing some particular Christmas theme. One year we decided to produce a play based on the story of The Littlest Angel. Tasha never missed a rehearsal. She memorized her lines. Her mother and speech therapist helped her with her pronunciation. The little girl on stage next to Tasha helped her by giving her her cues.

We needed someone to read a scroll proclaiming to the heavenly beings the birth of Jesus. Patsy Badger, the director of the play, asked me if I thought Tasha could manage the role of a herald. I said, "Yes, judging by her performance so far." Tasha was given this role as herald in addition to her other role. For some reason, the other children in the play seemed not to be jealous.

The day of the performance, Tasha's family, speech therapist, friends, and most of the congregation came. Tasha's delivery was excellent. Those who did not know of Tasha's handicap would never have guessed that she was deaf. Those of us who did know wept with joy.

After the performance, friends and family members each gave Tasha a rose. For the first time in Tasha's life, her worth was publicly affirmed. That day Tasha began to learn to accept herself as she was and to use the gifts God had given her. She started taking responsibility for her life. No longer would she let her deafness and feelings of rejection defeat her. In high school she was on the basketball, volley ball, soccer, and track teams. Scholastically she earned A's and B's. She went on to a top tier college.

Yes, she had to work harder than most of her peers. It is true her deafness continued. I do not know where she is today. But by now she may have a microchip planted within her ear which will enable her to hear. If so, you could call her ability to hear a scientific miracle. Tasha never gave up and those who loved her never gave up on her. It was these Christians who gave Tasha the necessary encouragement to realize her full potential.

Before you declare that this event is not a miracle, think again. Is it not possible that Tasha felt God's presence and God's will became known to her? Which would have been better for Tasha—a healthy, positive psyche and self image or the ability to hear? Which influences one's will to live life to the fullest?

If we search scripture, we find that it shows Jesus only healed a limited number of people. My guess is that Jesus wants each one of us to help him perform miracles in life. God does not want us to look to God for everything when we can help ourselves and each other. Men and women spend a life time studying to be doctors, scientists, spiritual counselors, and psychologists. God helps them to unlock the secrets of nature and how to cure that which afflicts us.

Think of all the opportunities you have in any given week to help others. You may think your help is insignificant. Yet your simple actions may cause someone to dare to do something positive and creative that he or she thought impossible to do. Through Christian faith, compassion, hope, and love, you not only open yourselves to the miracle of God's love, but you may also help bring that miracle to others.

Amen.