

Sermon / 27 October 2024 / Mark 10:46-52 / It's a Miracle!

Every encounter with Jesus is miraculous!
Every encounter with God is miraculous!
Every encounter with the Divine is miraculous!

Miracles abound when we open ourselves up to the words of Jesus.
Miracles are everywhere when we open ourselves to the love of God.

Miracles flow like rivers when we allow ourselves to experience the Divine.

Miracles are there if we allow ourselves to be open to them.

This is what happens in today's Gospel lesson. Bartimaeus, a blind man, encounters Jesus and experiences a miracle. He calls out to Jesus for help. He is not deterred by people telling him to be quiet and leave Jesus alone. Jesus takes the time to talk with Bartimaeus and asks what he wants. Bartimaeus tells Jesus he wants to see. And – miracle of miracles – Bartimaeus receives his sight.

His encounter with Jesus results in a miracle.

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The story of Bartimaeus holds a special place in my heart. I experienced a miracle connected to this beautiful Bible story.

Here at St. Mark's, as almost all Episcopal Churches do, we follow the Revised Common Lectionary. That means that we read scripture on Sunday mornings on a three-year cycle. So, every three years, we hear this story of Bartimaeus encountering Jesus and experiencing a miracle.

Picture it! 9 years ago, on the 23rd Sunday of Pentecost, I was leading Children's Chapel. It was 2015. I'd only been working here at St. Mark's as the Director of Christian Education for a few months. On that Sunday, I told the story of Bartimaeus to the gathered youth.

Upon completion of the story, one young person asked, “David, is that story real?” I didn’t even have time to be surprised when another youth piped up, “No. It’s just a myth.”

Immediately, my well-crafted lesson plan went out the window. (Actually, that alone was a very valuable lesson for ME that morning.)

I recovered quickly and said “myth” wasn’t the right word. A myth was something that had been made up. I continued that we believed the scripture was indeed, “real”, but perhaps for our purpose that morning we should look at the story of Bartimaeus in a different way.

I reminded the young people that Jesus sometimes told stories that were meant to teach us a lesson. They knew these stories were called parables. Although Bartimaeus is not a parable, what if we looked at it that way in 2015.

I asked them what Bartimaeus might have said when Jesus restored sight to his blind eyes. We batted around a few phrases but decided he’d probably exclaim, “I can see again! I can see! I see!”

BUT!

What if Bartimaeus wasn’t physically blind? What if Bartimaeus was simply an unhappy person? A couch potato who could find no purpose in life? What if he sat at home all day and played video games and ate junk food? What if Bartimaeus lacked drive and ambition?

While buying snacks at the corner store one day, Bartimaeus sees a group of people clamoring around Jesus. He’s curious and hangs out to hear what Jesus has to say. What if he gets close enough to look Jesus in the eye? What if Bartimaeus heard words of love....of forgiveness....of direction to serve those in need? What if Bartimaeus realizes that Jesus is the Messiah – the person the world has been waiting for to bring salvation?

What if Bartimaeus has an epiphany and shouts, “I see! I get it!” He runs home to grab his backpack and some clean underwear. He leaves his couch and video games and joins those following Jesus to change the world.

What if Bartimaeus wasn’t physically blind, but spiritually and emotionally blind to the needs of the world? What if he had no purpose and Jesus turned his life around with words of hope and love?

My point today, my friends, is this: That alternative version of this Gospel lesson is no less of a miracle than Jesus restoring sight to a blind man. No matter how we look at the story, Bartimaeus' life was miraculously changed by Jesus.

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I'll briefly tell you my miracle with the Bartimaeus Gospel. I shared the story of that Children's Chapel at a Diocesan meeting a few months later. My point was that our youth are smart, deep thinkers. But my words got twisted and I was called before the Bishop and Canon Theologian of the Diocese because they had heard I told the children of St. Mark's that Jesus did not perform miracles. I assured them I had said no such thing. I shared with the bishop and canon what I've just shared with you. Miraculously, I was quickly excused with my ordination process still intact.

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There are 2 helpful points about experiencing a miracle in the story of Bartimeus to take home with us today.

First, seek that miracle and don't take no for an answer.

Bartimaeus has nothing. He's a beggar with no resources. He has a chance encounter with Jesus and shouts to him, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." The crowd tells this "nobody" to be quiet and not bother Jesus. But Bartimaeus will not be deterred and yells louder still, "Jesus, have mercy on me." Bartimaeus wants to have a Jesus experience and is rewarded for his tenacity. Jesus stops and talks with him.

And that brings us to our second helpful point – know what you want and ask for it.

Jesus wastes no time. He asks, “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus seems impressed by the fearlessness of this person who has been thrown to the fringes of society. Bartimaeus replies with a direct answer, “I want to see again.”

Seek that miracle and don't take no for an answer.
Know what you want and ask for it.

Every encounter with Jesus is miraculous!
And we encounter Jesus in every single person we meet.

Every time you interact with another person, there is the opportunity to experience a miracle.

But let me suggest that we often overlook miracles or may not be open to them because we are too busy with our own agendas – our “to-do” lists – our phones – our need to keep up appearances and not look needy or silly or not in control of every situation. We miss the opportunity for miracles because we lack faith – or don't believe miracles can happen to us.

Like Bartimaeus, we must open our hearts as if we have nothing to lose...and everything to gain.

Go to coffee hour. Get a piece (or two or.....) of pie. Sit down and talk to someone. Expect something miraculous to happen. Making a new acquaintance can be a miracle itself.

Volunteer to work with our youth and be blown away by how much they think about the world and how we can make it better.

Go to Church Unbound this afternoon and hand out food and words of love to people experiencing homelessness.

Start a book group. Ask someone to meet for coffee. Call a friend who you haven't talked to in a long time. Plan a visit – near or long distance – to someone just to connect. Sit on a bench, observe the world, and see miracles all around you.

Big or small. Join the Peace Corps or volunteer to read stories to children at your neighborhood library.

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