

**Becoming Workers of Miracles** Readings: Eph. 5:8-14; John 9:1-41 Lent 4/A  
By the Rev. Karen Faye Siegfried; Trinity Episcopal Church, Sutter Creek, CA 3/26/17

*“Live as children of light-for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true.”* {Eph. 5}

Yesterday, was the Feast of the Annunciation. It commemorates the visit of the archangel Gabriel during which Mary was informed that she would become the mother of Jesus. From the gospel of Luke, we read: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore, the child to be born will be holy; he will be called the Son of God.” {Luke 1}

So what does it mean to have the Holy Spirit come upon you? What does it mean that the child to be born will be holy? What does it mean to be with child from the Holy Spirit? For me, these are all theological statements meant to connect God with the conception & birth of a child. However, instead of recognizing these passages as spiritual statements meant to communicate Jesus’ connection and intimacy with God, people have made them into biological statements implying divine copulation. And to make matters more challenging, this doctrine has become an essential belief in traditional Christianity, especially with those who are orthodox.

Now the gospel of Matthew does not record such a visitation but simply states that Mary was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Yet in the previous paragraph in Chapter 1, Matthew traces Jesus’ genealogy back to Joseph, not Mary. Puzzling, isn’t it? The gospel of Mark is silent about the conception and birth of Jesus while the gospel of John traces Jesus’ roots back to God: “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God...and the Word became flesh and lived among us.” {John 1} What does all this theological jargon mean?

After his earthly ministry ended, the disciples began to reflect on the events surrounding Jesus of Nazareth and his connection to God. Some believed him to be a prophet, others the messiah, others the mouthpiece of God or the word made flesh. Still others began to see him as the Son of God, a title given to the Kings of Israel of David’s lineage. The title, “Son of God” gave way to God himself, and the church began to spend a lot of energy and emphasis trying to prove that Jesus was God. As a result, its focus became on worshipping his divinity rather than imitating his humanity. Jesus pointed to God and bid us to follow him as the way, the truth, and the life. And instead of following Jesus, we engraved his finger in stone and began to worship his finger. It was not until St. Francis of Assisi dedicated his life to follow in the footsteps of Jesus that the imitation of Christ became important in the life of the church. We Christians are still only in the very beginning stages of this life of imitation.

For some, the virginal conception of Jesus is a miracle and an integral part of their faith walk. For people like me, the birth of any child is a miracle. So being reminded that the Holy Spirit is very present in all of life, (including the birth of Jesus) causes me to embrace the readings from the gospel. However, I do not turn to the bible for biological explanations on obstetrics. It is a holy text that connects me more fully with the divine mystery. For others however, these gospel passages are a stumbling block that goes against their medical understanding of how a child is conceived. Yet today, many women experience virginal conceptions through in vitro fertilization. I suspect, that biological alternatives to natural conception will expand as infertility rises and cloning becomes more acceptable.

So the question that some of you might have is this: Do I have to believe in the doctrine of the virginal conception in order to be faithful? I will answer with this question: What does it mean to be faithful? Faith is not an intellectual belief in a list of doctrines. Faith is a radical trust in life and by implication, trust in the Source of Life. Faith is a commitment, loyalty, allegiance, and attentiveness to our relationship with God. Faith is one of the divine virtues that opens the door for the fullness of life. So if you want to be a faithful Christian, develop a deeper relationship with God and follow in the steps of Jesus as the way, the truth and the life. Let your mind be transformed into the mind of Christ. Instead of throwing out the baby with the bath water because a doctrine does not make sense, “live as a child of the light embracing all that is good, right, and true.” In particular, become a worker of miracles. This is the focus of today’s sermon.

The definition of a miracle is when the seemingly impossible becomes possible. I remember the first time I noticed a miracle. I was standing on the edge of a steep cliff at a state park when a child fell off the ledge and plummeted to the valley. It was hundreds of meters down, the hill scattered with rocks and trees. I was sure the little boy would be dead by the end of the fall. Yet after a relatively short time, the emergency crews rescued him. Perhaps he had a few broken bones, but overall, he was breathing, responsive, and alert. How he survived such a fall is beyond my comprehension, but that he did, was the source of my prayer.

Miracles actually happen all the time. We just don't notice them. The seemingly impossible becomes possible as natural expressions of love. "The real miracle is the love that inspires them. In this sense, everything that comes from love is a miracle. Miracles are healing because they supply a lack. They are performed by those who temporarily have more, for those who temporarily have less." For instance, the miracle of love has been shown by the Rotary Club who has raised millions of dollars to eradicate polio worldwide or by those compassionate people in Africa who were brave enough to go into homes and transport people with Ebola to a hospital so they would have a chance of living.

"Miracles are a kind of exchange. Like all expressions of love, which are always miraculous in the true sense, the exchange reverses the physical laws. They bring more love both to the giver and the receiver. A miracle is a universal blessing from God through those who share compassion with others." {Course in Miracles} It is this miracle of compassion, attention, and healing that Jesus offered to the blind man in today's gospel story. Let's take a closer look.

A man who had been born blind receives his sight through his interaction with Jesus. How did this occur? Did Jesus have special gifts of healing? Did soaking in the waters of the pool of Siloam do the job? Did God wave a magic wand over the man's eyes to recover his sight? I am not sure. But what I do know is that once he was blind and now he sees. For some, like Thomas Jefferson, this story is a stumbling block and they would prefer to excise these stories from the bible as simply superstition.

However, whenever I read a story from the bible, I try to understand the context and why it was important for the author to include it in his gospel. For instance, John's gospel emphasizes Christology which means connecting Jesus to God. So he defines Jesus as the light that come into the world. He uses many other metaphors about light, seeing, enlightening, and blindness to show how God's power is working through Jesus. Today's story starts with a man who is assumed to be a sinner because he was born blind. In Jewish tradition, the sins of the parents would produce suffering in their children. But Jesus says *no* to this kind of thinking.

As the chapter continues, the blind man's sight is restored and he can see what the religious authorities do not. The topic of blindness moves from a physical to a spiritual level. In the end, the blind man not only sees in a physical way but also receives the spiritual light. The Pharisees on the other hand, remain stuck in their old ways of seeing. They are blind not only to human suffering but they refuse to open their eyes to see the hand of God in the healing of the blind man.

I have always been an advocate for the healing powers of water. I know that when my own blepharitis (inflammation of the eye lids) flares up, there is nothing better than soaking them in warm water to heal the inflammation. The same goes for soaking in water to recover from poison oak, an infected wound, and other skin related problems. And when water doesn't do the trick, I will go to a physician who has gifts of healing based on medical training. Some of these doctors are even able to restore sight to the blind and give people another chance to see. To me, this is a miracle.

But the real miracle in today's story is Jesus' compassion for the man born blind and those like him. Without such compassion, Jesus would have never noticed the man or stopped to help him in his condition. "A miracle is a service. It is the maximal service you can render to another." It is a way of loving your neighbor as yourself, having enough compassion to stop and help.

So instead of allowing miracles or doctrines to stop you from a life of faith, imitate Jesus by following in his footsteps of love. "Live as children of the light embracing all that is good, right, and true." Demonstrate your compassion and in so doing you too will become workers of miracles.