

June 28... Miracles, a thing of the past

David Blancarte almost was killed in a motorcycle accident about two decades ago. He survived, but had been confined to a wheelchair. Then, he was bitten by a Brown Recluse spider, a bite that sent him to a hospital for eight months. But, during that time, he began to feel his legs and, within five days, David was walking again.

It is becoming a common debate whether the institution of marriage is growing outdated. For Donnie Register, his marriage literally saved his life. Mr. Register was at the register when two armed men stuck him up. Confusion happened and Donnie lifted his left arm towards his assailants. A gun was leveled at his head and went off. The bullet hit his wedding band and was redirected away from his vital area. Pieces of the bullet remain lodged in nonthreatening locations of his finger and neck tissue.

Those are just two stories that people call miraculous. Many people desire miracles from God. So the question that we will discuss today is, do miracles still happen?

Father Edward McIlmail writes, "The New Testament records that Jesus performed a lot of miracles, either directly or through his apostles. Miracles helped to give credibility to Jesus' message and helped to demonstrate that he was indeed the Son of God. Miracles also gave credibility to the apostles' preaching.

Yet miracles were not the end-all of Jesus' mission. In fact, he tended to give more priority to his preaching than to his miracles. "Let us go on to the nearby villages that I may preach there also. For this purpose have I come" (Mark 1:38).

Still, miracles seemed to have a more prominent place in the early Church. As time went on, it seemed that God relied on more-normal signs of his grace to accompany his Church. These included the numerous works of charity done by and within Christian communities and the witness of Christian marriages and families.

I wondered this week, how many miracles are recorded in the Bible? The four Gospels credit Jesus with about three dozen miracles and the Hebrew Scripture begins with the miracle of creation. There is a cluster of miracles in the stories of Moses (a burning bush, staff turning into a snake, the 10 plagues, manna in the wilderness, and water from rock in the desert).

Elijah called fire from heaven. Of course we can't forget the greatest miracle of them all, the resurrection! And there are many more miracles in both "Old" & "New" Testaments.

So how often would you expect to find the word "miracle" in the Bible? I looked, expecting hundreds. But, In the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) the word "miracle"/"miracles" appears only 11 times! I triple-checked!!!

Why do you suppose that would be since there are so many miracles in the Bible? The reason is that the Bible uses another word to refer to what we call miracles. Translations often use the word signs instead of miracles. The word signs is found 167 times in the NRSV.

Why would the Bible use the word signs instead of "miracles"? I think it is because God had a special purpose for miracles. God intended miracles to serve as signs pointing people to God, whose power made miracles possible.

Jesus intended that people would see a miracle and think of God. Jesus intended that people would see and then they would say, "He did that by the power of God." Jesus intended his signs to make it easier for people to believe.

Miracles happened at least 167 times in the Bible. But miracles are a thing of the past.

My father was in a few really bad accidents when he was on the fire department. One particular accident happened when he was driving the ambulance (that was when they were using station wagons). Here is the picture. How did he survive that accident? They certainly didn't have the medical know-how of today!

But yes, miracles are a thing of the past.

Or how about another story, still in my father's career in the fire department. My father used to be the person on the back who would steer the back end of the truck. There was an accident and a hose knocked him off the truck and under a parked car. That was a nasty accident. Why is he still with us today?

I don't know, because miracles are a thing of the past.

Most/all of you know that I am pregnant. But only a few of you know my story about that. I have a number of medical issues, that I won't bore you with, that made getting pregnant very

difficult. Because of my many issues it was made clear that we could not naturally conceive. So we went to more drastic medical options. Many people think that IVF is the cure all and works every time. Well, guess what? It doesn't. In fact, it has less than a 30 percent chance of working. Our first round is an example of that. Eric and I had pretty much given up hope of having biological children (which would have been ok, after all, I am adopted). But on a whim (or was it) we decided 2 years later to try again. The results of that round is fairly self-explanatory.

But miracles are a thing of the past.

Here's another story starring my wonderful husband. I am going to tell you our deer story. One early summer day we were on his motorcycle riding from the farm back to his parent's house. We were riding down Henke Road, the sun was up, and the day was beautiful! My husband, in true farmer fashion, was absorbed in the scenery of the fields. I looked up ahead and what do I see? A deer broadside in our lane! I yell "deer!" He slightly turns his head and says, "Yeah?" "Deer!" I yell loudly. "Yeah?" he replies again. This time (I don't suggest doing this) I slapped him on the shoulder and pointed up ahead to the deer that we are getting awfully close to. So he grabbed the clutch and the break and began to slow down. As we approached the deer it ran off the road. Before we had the chance to let out a sigh, we saw on the right hand side of the road another deer. This deer was standing on the driveway. It began to run, but because it was on blacktop was having problems getting traction. After running in place it does a nose dive. Just as we passed the driveway the deer got up and ran across the road right behind our motorcycle.

That was a very scary event, but miracles are a thing of the past.

So, why don't we see miracles as common place? Julie Middleton writes, "Anything remotely amazing tends to get written off as coincidence or chance, a fake or a fraud. Miracles, signs or wonders 2000 years ago would not actually be seen as a miraculous today. Science has moved on at such a rate that we can explain earth tremors or lights in the sky. Healing can be done with modern medicine, we can travel very quickly from place to place and so on. We expect so much now. What would a modern sign or wonder constitute? I mean I'm not sure I can think of an example that could happen, that couldn't be explained away by modern science or technology.

And we are taught to question everything. We teach our children to question things, not to just accept what they hear. But is that a good thing? We want them to be able to form their

own, well-informed opinions. They can google every singular 'fact' that is brought to their attention. We can look up 'revivals' or miraculous happenings and form our own opinions on their validity. We often don't just accept it.

What about you?

Do you have your eyes open to see?

Do you have your heart open to believe?

Has God answered one of your prayers?

Have you seen a miracle?

When the stuff of the Bible was happening, the disciples could share the miraculous things that they had seen Jesus do and be believed, but now? What would people say if we went about saying I have seen a man healed with my own eyes? I saw a man with a withered leg grow back? I suspect the majority would think I was either crazy, lying or deceived. Have we lost our ability to trust? Our ability to believe? As Christians we have faith in God and that's a pretty big task isn't it? So why do we have trouble believing in miracles?

What about you?

Have you seen any signs that point to God?

Is your heart open to believe?

Signs pointing to God are all around us.

We are surrounded by them, sustained by them:

- The bread on our table is a sign pointing to God and His love.
- The air that we breathe is a sign pointing heavenward.
- The water that flows from our taps is a sign pointing to God.
- The trees and flowers that delight our view are signs pointing to God and his love.
- Every farmer's field is a sign pointing to God and His providence.
- Every supermarket shelf is a sign that God provides for US.

Let's:

Open our eyes to see!

Open our hearts to believe!

Open our lives and live!