

I Corinthians 12:1-11

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Let Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

John 2:1-11

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2 Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. 3 When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." 4 And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." 5 His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." 6 Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. 7 Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. 8 He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. 9 When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom 10 and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now."

11 Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

In our Gospel lesson this morning the last verse presents a serious problem. I hope I don't have to review the story of the wedding and the well known business of the water turning into wine, in order to call attention to that last verse which says, "Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him."

I should hope so! In fact the hard thing for me to understand is why, after being witness to such incredible events, did the disciples ever *doubt* who he was, or had the least little thought that he might be anyone other than who he claimed to be!

I only wish it were so easy for the rest of us.

But remember that later on, in the same Gospel, Jesus would take Thomas to task because, like the rest of the disciples, he'd had to see for himself. We call him "doubting Thomas," but it's a mistake to do that, and once again church tradition just got it all wrong. In John 20, when Jesus made a post resurrection appearance, Thomas had not been in the room. When the others told him about it, Thomas challenged their account-- who wouldn't have?-- and finally he said that he'd have to be privy to what the other disciples had already seen before he would believe it. In other words he wasn't asking for one thing more than what the others had already been part of. He wanted to be part of it too. Jesus obliged him by appearing the following week, taking care to show him the punctures in his wrists and ankles, along with the wound in his side.

Thomas was dumfounded, no less than we would be. Jesus chided him saying, "Thomas, Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Faith, as the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews noted, is "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Did you get that last part? It was the part about "the conviction of things not seen." Not seen...

So I have to wonder if all those miracles had any real significance. I'm talking about the neon ones: the feeding of the five thousand with a few loaves and fish, or that time when he was seen walking on the surface of the Lake of Galilee far from the shore, an event which has spawned as many jokes as it has sermons! If the Gospels are to be believed, the followers of Jesus, whether they were official disciples or "tag alongs", didn't need *to believe* anything about Jesus because it was all there before their eyes: an exorcism here, a healing there, the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame toss their crutches into the brush, and lepers are embraced.

But there is that haunting refrain involving Thomas; because Thomas must have been at Bethany when Jesus called Lazarus out of the tomb. He might have been at Cana and was as surprised as the rest when the wine actually seemed to improve as the party wore on.

Sometimes people like to test my orthodoxy by asking me if I believe the miracles of the Bible. I used to dodge that question by saying that I believe in the resurrection of Jesus

Christ, and if I believe that, then the rest of those miracles are easy to believe in. But I didn't really answer the question and the reason that I didn't answer the question is because it is not the least bit important to me if Jesus walked on water, or broke eight seconds in the hundred meter dash. Those neon miracles were written as John reported, so that Jesus' glory was revealed, "*and his disciples believed in him.*"

The point is that seeing is not believing. Remember Jesus and Thomas, "*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.*" So I'm thinking that it isn't so much believing or not believing in those miracles, but were those miracles really necessary? What was Jesus trying to prove? That's it, isn't it, what was Jesus trying to prove, or maybe it wasn't Jesus at all, maybe it was Matthew, and Mark, and Luke, and John whose agenda was showing just how different Jesus was than anyone else, by showing incredible miracles to underscore the claim that he really is the Son of the living God? How do I know? Why it's right there! Look what he did! Nobody else can do things like that, so he must be the Son of God!

Paul wrote that the righteous are saved by faith. That line lies within the foundation of the reformed faith. We are saved not by what we see, but what we do not see-- and believe that somehow God is behind all of that; and believe that there is purpose behind all of that, and value and meaning.

Let me give you an example of a miracle. Last Wednesday a terrible earthquake destroyed western Haiti and took an estimated 200,000 lives. That's about how many people live in Boone, Campbell, and Kenton Counties. So it's as though everybody who lives in those three counties was killed in the space of a few hours. Try to imagine, there's nobody here for worship, the building is destroyed, and we are all dead. The only sound is the shifting of ruined building materials during the aftershocks.

I say try to imagine, because the degree of instant horror is nigh unto unimaginable.

That's not the miracle. Here's the miracle. On Thursday or Friday I was watching the updates from Port au Prince and saw various rescue units from the US and China, (that would be the place we used to call Red China) and about a dozen other countries, gearing up to send those teams to Haiti. I heard President Obama pledge to send 100 million dollars to help ease the suffering. I heard him say that the most forsaken country on earth is not forsaken. I saw the huge Navy hospital ship getting ready to embark to the scene. People from all over the world are sending money over and above what their governments are sending. People from all over the world want to come and help, to wipe the tears from an infant's face, to help a dying man with a sip of water, to help restore order. Restore order? In Haiti? More like bring order to enable goods and services to be offered to thirsty, hungry, exposed, endangered people.

But all of these different nations some friendly, others not so much and yet all of us have gathered in common cause for the people of Haiti. Some religious, others not so much, and yet it hasn't stopped anyone from pitching in. Some rich some poor, but everybody wants to help as they are able to help. Politics has for the most part gone out the window and there is an incredible concern being expressed for the people of Haiti.

Here's a miracle, when the UN ordered their medical staffs to leave the hospital site they had erected because they were in danger, several doctors, including the CNN medical correspondent Dr. Sanjay Gupta, ignored the order and despite the personal danger they were in, stayed the night and continued to treat the injured and the sick. Pray for them for another night had passed, and another is coming.

Pray that they can continue their work in safety, and that the UN staff is able to rejoin them soon.

Here's a miracle. Go back to December 1, 1955, when a woman was arrested in Montgomery Alabama for refusing to give up her seat on the bus that she had paid for. Out of that event the Montgomery Bus Boycott began which for over a year blacks refused to ride the city buses in Montgomery. They did this successfully for a year, despite incredible harassment, threats, and bombings. By Christmas the following year the city buses in Montgomery were integrated and blacks were no longer confined to the back of the bus. This was also the event that launched a 26 year old pastor, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. into national prominence. His birthday was yesterday, he would have been 81 years old.

Here's a miracle. Go back to November 9, 1989, and remember the pictures taken as the Berlin Wall came down at the hands of ecstatic citizens and the people of the Democratic Republic of Germany were no longer held captive to Moscow. Everything changed after that. It was a different kind of healing miracle.

Miracles are about values, and meaning, and purpose. The blind see, the deaf hear, the dumb speak and the crippled walk, and so on.

Here's a miracle, “. . .*there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*”

Because God gives us gifts and opportunities, miracles can happen. We cannot take credit for the miracles, but we can respond in faith according to our gifts and the opportunities to use those gifts in valuable, meaningful and purposeful ways. It is because God created and continues to create us and we are not born into this world as a blank slate, even Paul knew that, and all those years ago.

And those gifts are perhaps the stuff of which miracles are made. It is much more credible to me that Jesus did these signs, in Montgomery, Berlin, and Port au Prince of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples, even we, believe in him.