

Jesus On The Move

The 4th Lenten Sunday Sermon presented by The Rev. Philip A. Rodgers presented March 26, 2017
at Trinity United Church in Malton, related to John 9:1-41

What with all that political maneuvering and stewing about Public Health Care in the United States two days ago and Donald Trump's failing efforts to reform ObamaCare, the question is raised for we Canadians...what do we Canadians do when we fall ill? Gratefully in this country we have, already in place, a universal healthcare system where every Canadian is cared for. But if you lived at the time Jesus lived you went to the first-century equivalent of the officially certified, governmentally sanctioned healthcare professional, that is, the priest. And the priest told you what to do with your pain: "Take two doves, have them properly sacrificed at the temple's high altar, and call me in the morning. Follow my prescription and you'll be all fixed up."

Like in the United States today, this system was fine for those who had the resources to pay for all this expert attention. But what if you were poor (illness and inability to work usually go hand-in-hand) and what if you couldn't afford the doves, much less the specialists at the Jerusalem altar? Well, too bad for you. No life-giving, liberating medicine for you. Your only hope was to contact one of those half-baked wandering magicians who, shunned by all respectable, educated people of means, traveled about taking advantage of the gullibility and the desperation of the suffering poor by offering them their magical healing arts for a small fee.

For some time now, at least since the birth of science, Jesus' miraculous work is an embarrassment for us sophisticated, modern, Western people. We can take Jesus as a teacher, but Jesus as a magician is a turnoff. We believe in medicine, the beneficent side of science, not magic or voodoo, which nobody but crackpots practice.

I believe and suggest to you that all healing, even that of the most expensive, university-related hospitals, is to a greater degree than we admit **faith** healing. Our exorbitant faith in and vast expenditures for the medical system may be due more to our affluence and our social class — and maybe to our idolatry, than to our scientific superiority to first-century Palestinians.

That Jesus was what we would dismiss as a magician says something about him I suppose, but more about us. Even Jesus' most severe critics, who had no intention of following him anywhere, agreed that Jesus performed many signs and wonders. Jesus met a blind man who implored him to restore his sight, so Jesus spit in the dust, made a mud paste, put it on the man's eyes and the man saw. Jesus' healing wonders serve as parables pointing to the truth of who Jesus really is. Not proofs — pointers, glimpses of who God is and what God wants. Of course, signs and wonders don't tell us modern people much, because we like to believe that we live in an orderly, cause-and-effect world governed by natural laws, where miracles are not permitted. Jesus' miracles disrupted the perceived world and indicated that there was more going on with Jesus and with us than we first imagined. Something is afoot!

Though Jesus healed many, he didn't heal everybody. He walked by all the sufferers laid out on pallets by the magical pool and unceremoniously healed only one crippled man who had been lying there for years. Jesus was downright annoyed when huge crowds dogged him and interfered with his teaching. As important as health and wholeness were to Jesus, something else was even more significant. Jesus never once told his disciples that, if they loved and obeyed him, he would free them from all pain and misery. In fact, just the opposite, he told them that there would be a cross for every one of them.

Jesus regarded his miracles as ambiguous at best, often charging people to keep quiet about them. When he healed people, he seemed to do it simply as overflowing compassion for those who suffered and as a sign that the kingdom of God was breaking out among them.

So let us admit that as followers of modernity, scientifically-minded people, we are at a keen disadvantage when it comes to thinking about Jesus' "signs and wonders." But the people with whom Jesus first worked assumed that reality is open, and there was a place for the periodic interventions and intrusions of the divine.

As for us, we value predictability, order, and control more than we love surprise, mystery, and wonder. We tend to think of our world as closed, rigidly following certain "natural laws," so that the line between "natural" and "supernatural" is unassailable. So if you start out with the assumption that miracles don't happen, well, then, don't be surprised when you conclude that the miracles of Jesus didn't happen. What a monumental loss this is to the human spirit!

What if, just for the sake of argument, we've been led to call "natural" is the result of God's loving, constant, though often subtle and undetected interaction with the world? What if there is room for the periodic interventions and intrusions of the divine. And what if we're wrong? What if there is more going on in us and in the world than we have been led to believe by the modern worldview? What if the "modern worldview" is itself a fiction, just another in the long line of futile human attempts to play God? What if Matthew, Mark, and Luke are right — something's afoot that can never be fully contained or described by our human modes of coping with the unknown?

In the miracles, it is as if Jesus pulls back the veil that separates the real from the unreal and shows us what is really going on behind the curtain of our limited notions of what's what. In miracles, what if the scripture is right? God was in this "wonder working, miracle performing Jesus" reconciling the world to Himself?" WHAT IF?

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, expand our minds and open us up to the possibility that something's afoot. Open us up to the possibility that there is more going on than we can explain and that the most interesting thing going on is your active love for us. Amen.