

**October 25, 2009**

**Mark 10:46-52**

**Do you believe in miracles?**

It seems to happen at least once a year.

On an otherwise "slow news day" the media gets wind of yet another "breaking news story" and suddenly the entire country is following the big event.

Most recently the story has been about the balloon boy.

The parents made up a story that their son was inside a flying saucer shaped balloon that was released by mistake.

The balloon was released, but it was no mistake.

It was a hoax. The parents created the whole event for publicity. It was a fraud. The only thing missing from this news sensation was a miracle sign of the divine.

You know, a vision of Jesus or the Virgin Mary appearing from the balloon.

Let's face it, \_ these puny epiphanies happen all the time.

The face of Christ miraculously appears in the cracked bathroom window of some rundown house.

The image of a descending angel miraculously floats above landscaped scenery.

And of course who can forget the miraculous transformation of a corn flake into an icon by the silhouette of Jesus that emerged upon its surface.

Do all these "miracles" make you mad? Or do you wish you had a miracle all your own? The way you would want a miracle to appear?

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It is utterly unfair that God could appear as a pillar of smoke by day and fire by night to the escaping Israelites, that Jesus could walk on the water and bring a dead man back to life, while we here in the 21st century are supposed to see a miracle on a corn flake!

Do miracles still happen?

Or, as some claim, did God stop working through miracles? This has been one of the biggest and longest-running controversies in the Christian faith.

For over five hundred years believers have been asking, "Can God still do miracles today?"

The Renaissance, the Reformation and the Enlightenment each added evidence to the walls of reason and logic.

But it took the Industrial Era to really start erecting a miracle-proof barrier between the ongoing work and presence of God in this world.

As these walls have grown higher and wider, the separation between those who continue to believe in miracles and those who utterly deny this kind of experience has become taller and deeper.

How ironic, then, that as we move ever deeper into the modern era, miracles are making a comeback.

Let's take, for example, the great debate over a supposed long-ago miracle \_ such as healing the blind.

Biblical healings have caused great theological debates. Churches have been split and thousands of books have been written on the possibility or impossibility of miraculous healings.

There have been heresy trials and ruined lives for the sake of this issue.

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The debate often has been ugly and nasty on both sides.

Reams of papers and teams of scientists have debated believers, denouncing the belief of miracle as anti-science, anti-rational and anti-intellectual.

Many of the defenders on both sides of the issues welcome such debate. The fundamentalists adhering to the literal translation of scripture mandate against the clinical liberal skeptics.

So where does this leave us today? We live in a world where science and medicine make it possible for miracles to happen every day. We call the process "Ophthalmology" and the results "corrected vision."

Why refuse to admit the possibility of God working miracles at the Kresge Eye Institute in Detroit every day?

Isn't it rather amusing that those who would refuse to allow God to perform miracles in the 21st century, have no problem at all with allowing human scientists to do the same thing?

Why is it that science gets all the miracle-making, wonder-working powers, and not God? Why is it we can't say, "science answers the how of life, religion answers the why of life"?

But what constitutes a "miracle" today?

Miracles are not divine holograms floating in the sky or bizarre appearances in spaghetti bowls.

A miracle is when God makes a way.

God can make a way in our lives when there seems to be no way. Miracles are a sign of God's active partnership with us \_ helping us to deal with the issues, remove the obstacles in our lives and in this world.

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"God doesn't solve problems for us.

God solves problems with us."

In today's gospel reading, the real miracle is from within blind Bartimaeus' powerful faith. He will neither shut up nor hold still.

Recall that in this healing story, Bartimaeus comes to Jesus. Jesus does not approach some sedentary, helpless figure.

It is the miracle of faith, a divinely given gift, which makes possible the restoration of Bartimaeus' sight. In the life of the blind roadside beggar, God made a way when there seemed to be no way.

You might be caught up short and stuttering if someone asked you point-blank: "What miracles has God performed in your life?"

We haven't been taught to think about events in our lives as "miracles" \_ we have been trained to look for threads of logic and reason and fact to hold the fabric of our lives together.

But what if you were asked, "Where has God made a way in your life when there seemed to be no way?"

As you ask yourself this question, try getting others to actually share their own experiences.

You may be surprised at how many people suddenly recognize and want to talk about the miraculous ways that God has opened for them.

If you do this, there are some leading questions you can ask to get people thinking about the miracles \_ big and small \_ that they have experienced in their lives.

1) Tell about a time when someone held your hand. Has there ever been a moment in your life when the miracle of a compassionate, sympathetic touch has transformed solitary anguish into comforting companionship?

Or, perhaps, the miraculous hand you recall is very small \_ the instinctive grip of a newborn's reach or the trusting squeeze of a grandchild's grubby paw. What "hand-held miracles" have you felt?

2) Tell about an incident when you couldn't stop laughing. Why do we always think of miracles as somber events? Even those that may have joyous results are usually considered serious.

The truth is that one of the greatest miracles of life is laughter. Laughing lowers blood pressure and reduces stress.

Unrestrained joy is the way God gives us a sneak preview of the coming kingdom. The miraculous way of laughter is one of God's greatest gifts.

Did you that Southwest Airlines has made it one of the prerequisites for being hired - a sense of humor.

3) Now: Recall an experience you consider as a miracle.

Give people the opportunity to talk and you listen, they will feel freer to suggest even out loud a whole host of experiences in their lives that may have miraculous qualities.

The point is to let people seriously consider the personal presence of God in their lives. Miracles are both desired and doubted because they testify to the activity of God on our behalf.

God does make a way for each one of us \_ but it's up to us to step out on that path.

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I believe that Jesus corrected the blindness of Bartimaeus back around 30 A.D...

I believe that Jesus corrected the blindness of his disciple followers. And I believe that Jesus still corrects the blindness of people living today.

But we must ask for God's help, guidance and direction.

In today's lesson Christ is asking, "What do you want me to do for you?" We must answer "let me see again".

Then Christ will answer,

"Go; your faith has made you well."

Amen!

