

### **Mark 1:21-28**

They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, Jesus entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.\*\*

**Exposing the Big Lie** - January 31, 2021

*Mark 1:21-28*

I'd like to share a story with you about a miracle. It might be familiar, I found it on several sites on the internet:

"She heard Daddy say it with a whispered desperation, 'Only a miracle can save him now.' Sally went to her bedroom and pulled her piggy bank from its hiding place in the closet. She shook all the change out on the floor and counted it carefully. Three times. The total had to be exactly perfect. No chance here for mistakes.

Tying the coins up in a cold-weather-kerchief, she slipped out of the apartment and made her way to the corner drug store. She waited patiently for the pharmacist to give her attention . . . but he was too busy talking to another man to be bothered by an eight-year-old.

Sally twisted her feet to make a scuffing noise. She cleared her throat. No good. Finally she took a quarter from its hiding place and banged it on the glass counter. That did it!

'And what do you want?' the pharmacist asked in an annoyed tone of voice. 'I'm talking to my brother.'

'Well, I want to talk to you about my brother,' Sally answered back in the same annoyed tone. 'He's sick ... and I want to buy a miracle.'

'I beg your pardon,' said the pharmacist.

'My Daddy says only a miracle can save him now . . . so how much does a miracle cost?'

'We don't sell miracles here, little girl. I can't help you.'

'Listen, I have the money to pay for it. Just tell me how much it costs.'

The well-dressed man stooped down and asked, 'What kind of a miracle does your brother need?'

'I don't know,' Sally answered. A tear started down her cheek. 'I just know he's really sick and Mommy says he needs an operation. But my folks can't pay for it . . . so I have my money.'

'How much do you have?' asked the well-dressed man.

'A dollar and eleven cents,'

Sally answered proudly. 'And it's all the money I have in the world.'

'Well, what a coincidence,' smiled the well-dressed man.

A dollar and eleven cents . . . the exact price of a miracle to save a little brother.' He took her money in one hand and with the other hand he grasped her mitten and said 'Take me to where you live. I want to see your brother and meet your parents.'

That well-dressed man was Dr. Carlton Armstrong, renowned surgeon ... specializing in solving Georgi's malady. The operation was completed ... without charge and it wasn't long until Georgi was home again and doing well.

Mommy and Daddy were happily talking about the chain of events that had led them to this place. 'That surgery,' Mommy whispered. 'It's like a miracle. I wonder how much it would have cost?' Sally smiled to herself. She knew exactly how much a miracle cost ... one dollar and eleven cents ... plus the faith of a little child!"

A grown man, not a child is the subject of our scripture this morning. But what they have in common is that they both experienced healing in ways that cannot be easily explained.

Let's face it, belief in miracles is a very personal part of our faith journey. I have little doubt that every one of us has desired God to intervene in our lives or the lives of family, friends, and even strangers. Some of us have our own miracle stories, both positive and negative. Some of us can tell stories of prayers answered: improbable, almost impossible events that are nevertheless true. At the same, I expect we all can share stories of miracles that did not happen as we desired, requests that were not answered the way we wanted them.

Are miracles real? Scripture is full of miracle stories. Jesus attracted followers because they believed he could perform miracles. On the other hand, many skeptics find miracles impossible to believe because they violate scientific laws. One person's miracle is another person's coincidence. Thomas Jefferson went so far as to make his own Bible, a Bible to which he

literally took a blade and cut out all the stories of Jesus' miracles. Jefferson obviously felt that if he could not bend scientific laws personally, Jesus could not have done so, either.

But to Jefferson and all others who are skeptical about miracles, we have to question what their definition of miracle is. I mean, if we simply equate miracles as being magical, unexplained events, then I can see why people might not accept the "magic." They would call miracles just mere coincidence. Ye, they freely admit that strange, unexplainable things do happen all the time, but then they argue that simply because we can't explain them right now doesn't mean there is a rational, logical explanation out there, we simply don't know it yet.

But that's the mistake in thinking about miracles simply in terms of magical, unexplainable occurrences, or, for that matter, prayers as "magic spells" intended to invoke the power of God. I know we can point to many stories in scripture where a prophet or king or Jesus utters certain words and people are suddenly transformed. Aha! Magic words, presto change-o, something marvelous happens.

Yet seeing miracles as magical occurrences obscures what they are really about. The problem is when we limit our understanding of miracles merely to magical, unexplainable events, we fail to see that miracles are in fact all around us.

We take so much for granted that we really should not. Think about it. We are here. We are alive. We are living on the only possible place in our solar system that can support sentient life. The fact that we have air and water and land all at the right temperature is miraculous. Take our bodies. How is it possible that the fusion of two impossibly small cells results in the miracle that is the human body? Our hearts beat. Our lungs oxygenate our blood, our stomachs help extract nutrition. All this — with dozens of specialized organs and glands and enzymes to make it possible. Yes, we're getting good at figuring out how our bodies work — down to the microscopic level. But how all these bodily systems came together, topped by an organ called the brain that allows us to question and explore it all — that is a miracle! How can we as human beings even contemplate for one second the idea of harming or denigrating another human being? We are all miracles. We are all evidence of the disruptive power of God.

Personally, I find it much more reasonable to explain my existence and that of the earth and stars in terms of God's disruptive transformation of the universe, rather than some random collection of molecules coming together to randomly create what we experience as life.

When we define miracles not as mysterious magical events, but God positively disrupting the status quo, then the work of Jesus becomes both more significant and more understandable.

In today's scripture, Jesus disrupted a man's life by healing his body. But he did more than disrupt that man's life. Jesus disrupted the universe. Here's how: First, Jesus drove out demons from the man. Now, we may think of demons as being red-colored evil creatures with horns growing out of their heads. That is not what they are. Demons, or the demonic forces, are all around us and they permeate our lives. Demons, friends, are not simple evil spirits. No. Demons and demonic forces represent the negative, creation-sapping, life destroying energy that is at total war with God. When seen this way, Jesus was not just healing a man, Jesus was declaring war on everything that seeks to undermine God and God's creation.

What did the demons say to Jesus? They screamed, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." The word, us, is critical. Jesus is taking on all forces that seek to destroy us, the health of our bodies being just one aspect of God's concern.

Moreover, this miracle of Jesus is the first public action of Jesus' ministry in the Gospel of Mark. This is Jesus' manifesto, so to speak. Jesus comes onto the scene and disrupts the way things are expected to be. He drives out evil and restores God's plan for this man. But notice at the same time, even as Jesus is restoring creation, he is turning people's perceptions upside down. Jesus heals in the synagogue, God's place. The witnesses are astonished not only at Jesus' healing, but also his teaching. Jesus speaks with authority. Jesus has come to fulfill God's plan and God's vision not just for that one man, but for all humanity.

This is the heart of the Good News! This is why Jesus has come to bring peace to those who follow him but a sword to those who embrace evil. Jesus has come to destroy the Big Lie. To

expose it for what it is and demonstrate God's power, God's creative positive power can and will defeat the Big Lie.

What is the Big Lie, you ask. Richelle Goodrich expressed it well:

“The biggest lie we fall for is that it doesn't matter. Your opinion doesn't matter. Your choices don't matter. Your influence doesn't matter. Your existence doesn't matter. You don't matter. It is the worst, most destructive lie we ever believe, and in consequence it wreaks extensive damage to more lives than your own. Don't fall for that evil lie. Don't forget that everything about you absolutely does matter.”

More than anything else, when Jesus healed that man, he declared the most wonderful truth of all. That man mattered. God was not going to surrender him to the forces that sought to destroy his life. No, he mattered. And the Good News for you and me is that you matter and I matter. Yes, we matter to God. Jesus came into the world to affirm once and for all that our existence on this planet, our existence in the vast universe, these are important and wonderfully miraculous events, because we matter.

I invite you to take some time, soon, to examine your life. Examine your choices. Examine your wants. Examine your deepest desires. Examine and question and ask yourself if they are consistent with the positive, life changing and life affirming work of Jesus or are they mostly about getting ahead or showing off at the expense of others?

We are literally saturated in miracles. They are both in us and all around us and God is working new miracles all the time — we just don't appreciate them for what they are.

Rise up, my friends, rise up and conquer the Big Lie. God loves you more than you can imagine because you, yes you matter. Yesterday, Today, and always.

I say these words in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.