

SEEN ANY MIRACLES LATELY?



There are people that say there hasn't been a miracle since Bible times. And others would affirm that miracles are few and far between. But if your definition of a miracle is God's interaction with this world, then you would have to proclaim that miracles are everywhere - because God is everywhere.

We have a great deal to be thankful for in our nation. One of the prominent figures in our country's formation is Thomas Jefferson. The Declaration of Independence is one of the greatest and most consequential documents ever written. But when it came to considering the miracles of God, Jefferson was what we call a "rational theist." He wrote his own revision of the Gospels. In that revision he mostly omitted everything supernatural, which is to say he removed **all the miracles - including the resurrection**. His account of the Gospel ends with the Crucifixion and the burial of Jesus. The last words of the Gospel in the Jefferson bible are: "They placed Jesus in the tomb and rolled a huge stone to cover the entrance."

I would say that Jefferson's opinion and perception of miracles is actually the norm in our world today and not the exception. **When does a miracle become invisible? When it becomes commonplace.** Miracle is not a word used in our everyday language and culture. We use such words as luck, fortune, fate, chance or karma - but seldom miracle. A hard, dead seed is placed in the ground and up sprouts life that produces a great harvest. In between seminary prep and the seminary, I spent eight years farming. Farming is hard work. But from the preparation of the soil to the planting to the harvest, a farmer witnesses the miracle of God's growth while always looking forward to the harvest. So, too, the Church. With eyes focused on the final harvest on Judgement Day, we witness the miracle of God's work in and through Word and Sacrament.

We see God's growth in the life of the Church. We place someone on a prayer list and they are healed. Is this not a miracle? Children and adults are baptized, a couple is joined together as one flesh and sinners are forgiven, redeemed, restored and declared new. These are all miracles! We can't reproduce it. Satan would love that the miracles of God would become commonplace to us, invisible as it

were. And one of the most commonplace (every day) miracles of God is the growth of His Kingdom.

Growth happens all around us, in people, animals and plants. It can be measured and charted; we know that cells divide and produce more cells; we know living organisms require nourishment, water, and the right environment. But still, growth is somewhat of a mystery. What is it in your body that says it's now time to grow a few more inches (or not grow any more hair on top but instead in other places)? What tells a tree to stop growing taller after it reaches a certain height? Growth is a miracle. Think of the little seedling that takes root in a crack in an asphalt parking lot, but yet, certain home plants just keep growing limp even when cared for with the best intentions (I'm not mentioning any names).

God's Word is the seed that alone has the power to grow within it. Notice in verse 28 of the Gospel the words, "by itself." In Greek, the word is "automatos" from which we get our English word, "automatically." Growth comes about solely through the work and power of God. The farmer can plow and plant and fertilize and cultivate, but the growth is out of their hands. **Satan knows best of all that if there is no seed planted, there is no growth and, therefore, no harvest.**

God's Kingdom will grow regardless of what we do and sometimes even in spite of what we do and don't do. Jesus said, *"The sower sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how."* What great comfort we have from Jesus when He explains that the growth of the Kingdom is NOT about us. It's not about this program or that one, or doing more of this or that or becoming discouraged about the lack of growth in some area. But also know this: Kingdom work is God's work, but this is not an excuse for inaction or laziness on our part. To think that if God's doing it (and He is), then we can just sit back and not do anything at all. No! Rather, **it is an invitation** to live our lives and our vocations in faith. To keep reaching out and doing all we can for each other, to do all that we do *in faith*. To not get discouraged if we don't see the results, but to scatter the seed of God's Word, and know that He will grant the growth. It's His Church, and He'll grow it.

In faith, we see things as they are. Every Sunday morning, the seed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is sown. Guilt is replaced by peace. Death is replaced by life. As Luther so simply put it in the Small Catechism, where there is forgiveness of sins

there is life and salvation. And through all these gifts, the Holy Spirit is at work strengthening faith and love toward our God, and He moves us to love our neighbor. That's the tiny mustard seed growing, and that, by the power of the Spirit. In this life, in this world, the Kingdom of God will appear to be just a mustard seed: insignificant, irrelevant, incapable of great things. But we know and rejoice that the Gospel of Jesus, which is the power of God unto salvation, hidden in common earthly means, is revealed to us so we can bear witness to a miracle. Power that has forgiven our sin, called us to faith, and given us eternal life.

And like those birds that Jesus talked about, seeking shelter in the shade of a mustard plant, we live by faith within the shelter of this Kingdom of grace, where Christ's righteousness covers all our sin. And then, one day, when our Lord returns, we and all the world, believer and unbeliever alike, will see just how great the Kingdom of the mustard seed is. But until that day, we who live in and with knowledge of the mystery of the mustard seed have lives of extraordinary hidden significance. Miracles, really! No one may take notice of a parent who has a devotion in the Word with his child for five minutes at the end of each day. Seemingly insignificant. But remember the mustard seed and rejoice in what you do in Jesus' name. Likewise, a simple invitation extended to someone to come to worship, where the gifts of Jesus are given and the brokenness of sin is healed. It won't make the nightly news, but it will cause rejoicing in heaven.

In God's growing Kingdom, it's all about the "yield." When we think of yield, we first think of numbers. How much did the crop yield this year? But this is not what Jesus is teaching in the parables. Our Christian lives are NOT a litany of one "I have to" after another. In God's hands, the conditions for growth are most favorable. We know what it means to have unfavorable conditions for growth - drought, flood, frost, hail, infestation of insects or worms. There are unfavorable conditions for growth in God's Kingdom as well - failure to forgive and forget the past; an unwillingness to take God at His Word in the stewardship of our lives and blessings; thinking that God's grace and mercy are not enough to cover any and all hurt and pain; a schedule that doesn't intentionally include time for God's Word and worship. These all take away our "yield" to God's will and plan.

The seeds must be sown to grow. Maybe you can't see it right now; maybe all the growth right now is underground. But the Word of God is working; the Spirit of God is working; the Kingdom of God is growing. And God is doing it. Through all

times and ages, movements and philosophies, the attacks of false religions and culture counter to God's Word and will, and even though Satan never rests, the Word of God is working; the Spirit of God is working; the Kingdom of God is growing.

You all have heard of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, India. But who would have thought she ever would have attained such influence when she first began? A tiny woman, she began with the most meager of resources. Mother Teresa told her superiors, "I have three pennies and a dream from God to build an orphanage." "Mother Teresa," her superiors said, "you can't build an orphanage with three pennies . . . with three pennies you can't do anything." "I know," she said, smiling, "but with God and three pennies I can do anything." Mother Teresa understood the principle of the seed that Jesus taught. It takes very little, but very little blessed by God and miracles occur every day.

Join me in praying for the miracle of God's Kingdom growth to continue in the face of direct opposition. The miracle of God's promise with the rainbow is now associated with something opposed to how God created man and woman and the gift of sex and identity with June being declared as "Pride" month. But a miracle happened this week as the court sided in favor of Loudoun County PE teacher, Tanner Cross. In the face of the school board's pro-transgender policy, he planted the seed of God's Word. He expressed that he would not and could not re-tell culture's lie of tolerance. Tanner spoke directly, but with gentleness and respect, that to speak the culture's lie is "lying to a child, it's abuse to a child, and it's sinning against God." In the time since he said this to the Board, he has received an outpouring of support from fellow Christians - planting the seed in the face of opposition. And the miracle happened - the judge supported his constitutional right to support the common interest of the public. Prayer answered. God's Kingdom keeps on growing. And it's growing from the tiny seed of one teacher speaking God's truth - even if it cost him his job.

Join me in praying for each one of us to be used as willing, able and equipped vessels to sow the seed of God's Word in the course of our daily lives. Have you ever noticed the progression in Psalm 1 (the Psalm for this week)? The man in the Word (likened to a tree planted beside the water) goes from sitting to standing to walking. That's Kingdom growth. The Holy Spirit has convicted our hearts to rejoice in the privilege of participating in a miracle. God makes us His children, but

also His ambassadors. **He equips us with tools like Every One His Witness, Re:Vitality and Making Disciples for Life (all found on the Synod's website lcms.org).** The mustard seed is powerful. For that seed is the Word and power of God to forgive sin and raise the dead; the Word and power of the cross, the Word and power of His love. So scatter that seed, sow it with joy, trust in God, rest in the branches of the cross. And let us pray that God will make it grow among us all.

Seen any miracles lately? Share them with us!! The miracles you share will help open our eyes to God's daily interaction and work in the course of our daily lives. Share how you have seen God's Kingdom grow where you are. Send your stories to this email: evangelizationteam@englishdistrict.org We look forward to hearing from you. No seed is too small or insignificant. We would love to hear from you. In the meantime, just keep sowing and witnessing God's Kingdom growth as the harvest nears.

In Christ Alone,
Pastor John Diener
Galatians 2:20
Evangelization Team