

The Heavens Are Telling the Glory of God

Isaiah 40:21-31

Job 28: 20-21, 23-28

Let's think about *miracles* this morning...

Most nights, I watch reruns of a British TV series called “Rumpole of the Bailey.” Rumpole is a barrister whose creed is “Always defend!” In one episode, he defends in Ecclesiastical Court; a vicar is accused of “conduct unbecoming.”

The opening scene shows the young reverend preaching in the pulpit of “Lawnchester” Cathedral. In one of the pews, his accusers show displeasure with his chosen text. I'll quote, using Reverend Donkin's inflections:

“The gospel according to St. Matthew, chapter 16, verse 4...(Jesus said,) 'A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign...and there shall be *no* sign given unto it.’” Reverend Donkin continues, “You're always looking for sign, aren't you? You're looking for miracles...Can't you believe in the goodness of God unless he entertains you with conjuring tricks? ...No doubt God can perform miracles...No doubt He can do jolly well *everything*; but why should He? ...Look up at the sky.

A red sky tonight means a fine day tomorrow. Isn't *that* enough of a miracle for you?”

Reverend Donkin's challenging introduction to his sermon questions the validity of our need for miracles, or for God to demonstrate God's

power with actions and results that please *us*. I have talked with friends who Do and friends who Don't believe in, or require miracles to confirm their faith. People may either negate, disregard, accept, or embrace miracles. After I read the passage from Isaiah that we heard this morning, I concluded that we as humans do not have the understanding or perspective to properly understand God's wisdom in any realm, including acts of God's power, which we might call miracles.

In faith, there are “Mysteries;” perhaps Mysteries are another name for miracles or simply the unknown. {I love a good mystery!} My Catholic friends pray the Rosary, which helps them to contemplate the Holy Mysteries of Jesus and his mother Mary called the Mysteries of Joy, of Sorrow, of Glory, and of Light.

In this morning's Prayer of Reflection, written by Reverend Ruth Shilling Hainsworth, we thank God “for all we understand, and for all that remains a mystery.” Isaiah tells us that only God holds the key to every mystery. Isaiah says, “God is everlasting, the creator of the ends of the earth. His understanding is unsearchable.”

How can we be assured of this power of God? Reverend Donkin alluded to it, but the Psalmist says it much more beautifully: “The heavens are telling the Glory of God; the firmament proclaims his handiwork.” That in itself is proof enough for me, although, at the same time, I will neither discount all recorded miracles, nor refuse to acknowledge the possibility of future miracles.

Here's something unusual to ponder... Our daughter-in-law Yanina is originally from Russia. She has shared with us that most Russians firmly believe in extra-terrestrial life; it is just a part of their culture. For some reason, in the United States, any sightings of unidentified flying objects or encounters with extra-terrestrial beings have been snickered at and discounted as crazy. Until a few years ago, any such sightings were kept highly classified by our government, perhaps to protect the public from irrational fear. Recently declassified documents total thirteen million pages on this subject! Since 1947, the Central Intelligence Agency reports that there have been 1,500 reported sightings of UFOs, with twenty percent still unexplained. Many of these sightings occur at sea, and as of April of 2019, the U.S. Navy is developing guidelines on how to report UFO sightings. Now, you can even read the testimony given to military personnel and Colonel Charles Lindbergh of a woman who had two-way telepathic contact with an extra-terrestrial being.

Why am I mentioning all this? ...When one thinks about the possibilities of more intelligent life out there in God's universe, our own lives take on a much more humble proportion. Later, we will sing the hymn "How Great Thou Art;" the writer and composer Stuart K. Hine mentions "all the worlds God's hands has made." We humans are just an infinitesimal part of all those worlds. I think it is good to have that reminder. We can tend to put too much credence on our own interpretation of life, forgetting that we

judge and form mindsets only from what we *know*. We do our best to develop a personal philosophy and faith that harmoniously fits our lives...Perhaps it is best to keep those beliefs flexible and fluid. We may find out more pieces of God's puzzle as we go along.

Thomas a Kempis is the credited author of a “call and guide to spiritual aspiration” entitled The Imitation of Christ. It was originally written in Latin sometime in the fifteenth century. Thomas was a member of the Order of Brothers of Common Life and he lived in a monastery in Utrecht, Holland for seventy years. In his chapter on Interior Conversations (with God), he writes, “We are but aliens and pilgrims.

We should put our complete trust in God. Let God be the center of our love and fear. All earthly things are transitory and you as well.”

Throughout the history of mankind, we have tried to find explanations for the wonders of nature and the origins of life. We can now explain so many things through scientific theory, research, and reason, but there is so much more we will never be able to explain. The power to create such finely-tuned Systems... from the orbits of the tiniest atomic electrons to the orbits of the solar system's planets, is but one of God's miracles. The twenty-sixth chapter of the book of Job helps us envision God's creativity: “God gave to the wind its weight and apportioned out the waves by measure, God made a decree for the rain and a way for the thunderbolts.” Although *we know little*, God has the wisdom and power beyond our understanding. Through our faith, we know that God's miracles are everywhere, everyday, past, present, and future.

I love to think of God as the master watchmaker, an inspiration from Dutch Holocaust survivor, Corrie ten Boom. Her faithful Christian father saved the lives of as many as 800 Jews by hiding them in the family home above his watch repair shop. God's power is generously shared with us, for helping one another through every miraculous day that God dawns.

In 1779, William Cowper penned a hymn called “Light Shining Out of Darkness.” You may recognize these words:
“God moves in a mysterious way...
His wonders to perform...
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm..
Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan his work in vain;
God is his own interpreter...
And he will make it plain.”

Jesus teaches us the ways to maintain a strong belief in God and in God's omniscient power- through Humility, Compassion, and Forgiveness. All these disciplines help us to fight the *false* power of self-importance. Jesus sits us down in our “tent,” as Isaiah describes the earth...and thwarts our desire to control all aspects of our lives, and even the lives of others. With Jesus, we have a personal guide for “the living of these, our days,” a favorite expression of our former Interim Pastor, Reverend Raymond Bradley.

But what is to come? Will we join our Maker in God's Heaven? I suppose this is one of the biggest mysteries of faith. In the present time,

we can try not to be frightened of our own death or overburdened with sadness for the death of our loved ones. We can strive to trust that even death is part of God's grand blueprint. Isaiah reminds us to “lift up our eyes on high and see...who created everything. He who calls everyone by name; because he is great in strength, mighty in power, not one is missing.” I know we will be eternally cared for by the God who knows each one of us so well.

Allow yourself to be awed by miracles of the past, let miracles inspire your faith. Even the scientific miracles we gladly acknowledge: DNA, the birth of stars, and photosynthesis, to name just a few, testify to God's amazing design. They assure us that God is keeping the watch ticking, all in good time. Let us be expectant of miracles yet to come; however, we are not able to judge how and when miracles should occur; humans do not possess that wisdom. I think that is the one way I agree with Reverend Donkin from the British TV show.

Shakespeare's Hamlet said, “There are more things in heaven and earth Horatio, than are dreamt of in *your* philosophy.” Shakespeare reminds us to let our minds be open doors.

What we do *not* know reminds us to be ever humble. Although, this does not mean we should totally give up our will to the winds of fate; we must live our lives as best we are able, never allowing ourselves to be beaten by unfortunate circumstances. Humility makes us more apt to

appreciate God's greatness.

Thomas a Kempis explained, "For human beings *propose*, but God *disposes*."

I'll close with a more contemporary quotation! My father loves the 1994 movie "Forrest Gump," starring Tom Hanks. Forrest declares, "My mama always told me that miracles happen every day. Some people don't think so, but they *do*!"

If you ever feel that only a miracle could make the difference in your life, look up... God's heavens proclaim his handiwork. Soar through the universe. Know that God's miracles are there... they are here on earth, and within you. May *you* be lifted up on the wings of an eagle. Feel God's sun on your face and the miracle of God's warmth in your heart.

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