

Do You Believe in Miracles?

Mark 4:26-34

Do you believe in miracles?

How do you define a miracle? Sometimes, in our culture, we've come to disregard "miracles," because we've set the bar so high for what "wows" us that we end up missing all of the small miracles all around us!

We can still experience BIG miracles. But what about the miracles we experience every single day and for the most part take for granted: the miracle of birth, the miracle of life, the miracle of our universe, the miracle of a single seed.

The miracles all around us remind us that we are not alone but also that human beings alone could never duplicate the vastness, complexity, and miraculous nature of God's created world. It's far beyond our abilities and comprehension. Even our best physicists and astronomers can't figure out the underlying secrets of the universe—how it operates or how it originated.

As much as we'd like to ignore these kinds of dilemmas, they remain. We cannot explain, control, predict, or create much of what we steward on this planet and in our lives. We can contribute. We can observe. We can creatively and industriously make the most of what we've been given in trust by God to care for. But we are not and never will be the "creator and owner of that vineyard."

When Jesus attempts to explain in our scripture for today how we are to behave as trustees of God's created world, and what our job entails as God's vineyard workers to ensure a "kingdom" kind of community, he explains it in terms of seed sowing and seed scattering.

The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow; he does not know how....when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.

There it is! We are the Sowers and the harvesters. That's our job. We sow seeds. And we gather in.

We sow. God creates. We celebrate. That's it. Sounds simple, doesn't it? We plant seeds. God will do the rest. Then why do we make it so hard? You know we do! Especially in the church!

We as humans make this process incredibly hard. First, we hate sowing seeds. And even when we do, we pretty much "kill that plant" before anything can even take root with our expectations and pessimism.

If we do attempt to "grow," instead of letting God do God's part, we feel the need to plan it, schedule it, strategize it, create outcomes for it, make goals out of it, create statistics from it, or set up a schema of success or failure out of it. Anything to keep our hands in the pie and ourselves in control of the outcomes. Anything to avoid putting faith in and relying on God's role in the process. Because the bottom line is that we in the basest parts of our hearts believe that we are the only ones who can "fix" our declining numbers.

We need to own up to this. Christians though we may be, most of us in our hearts do not truly believe that God can still work miracles. That God is present and capable of doing the work that Jesus tells us God can and will do. We believe that if something is to change, we must do it.

The irony is that because our efforts in "creating results" our way has so often failed, we have not only given up on God's abilities and our own, we have given up on sowing altogether. So not only have we given up the belief that God can make change for us and given up the belief that we can do it on our own, now in utter disillusionment over our "existential" dilemma, we have given up on trying at all.

Yet what we do know and recognize is that a church that cannot reproduce, like any crop or animal, will eventually die out. Everything that expects to grow and flourish must continue to reproduce. So what do we do?

Do we simply sit back and wait for our demise? Or do we go back to the scripture, listen to what Jesus is telling us, and begin our process over again in a different more faithful way?

Can we begin again sowing seeds....harvesting in joy....and leave everything in between up to God? Can we believe again that God will provide? Instead of planning, can we begin planting.

As all gardeners and farmers know, cultivating a field is an organic process. When you plan it too much on your own terms, you kill it. You need to water certain crops in certain amounts and ways. You need to be sensitive to planting some plants in the sunlight and others in the shade. You need to allow them to grow and flourish without trying to harvest them too early. Everything in God's time. Some plants may wither; others may grow like weeds, depending on the soil, the weather, and many other conditions. But what God touches will bloom and grow.

For Jesus, the kingdom of God, will grow and flourish according to the will of God. We don't need to force individuals, push them, or trick them into becoming what we imagine they should be. All we need to do is sow God's seeds of love and grace, and God will work miracles in their lives.

In today's world, our churches must again learn to seed and dare to plant, without the need to plan outcomes and set goals. Goals really are efforts to ensure that we benefit from our labors. But this is not God's way. When we seed and plant according to God's will, without expectation, plan for self-benefit, or control, we will witness the kinds of miracles that God will do in the lives of others.

Planting/seeding is something you do to benefit someone else. It's a commitment to feed others.

The truth is, we don't need to be actual farmers to plant the way God intended. In fact, God's directive to us from the time of the Garden of Eden was to "till and keep". The covenant of God between us and all of humankind, is to bear the fruit of that relationship to all generations. We are seed bearers and Sowers. We are to plant the seeds of love, hope, prayer, and the gospel and allow God to work the miracles among people that only God can do. That only God can do.

Jesus tells us that all it takes is a little bit of love and faith to start an entire movement. A mustard seed can do the job. Just a little bit of faith in God's ability and power, and the kingdom community that Jesus' imagined will begin to grow like a weed.

Planting seeds of love for the future must be the primary industry of the church. If the church is to survive beyond its current generations, it must begin to sow the seeds that will let it reproduce. We cannot control it. We cannot decide it. We cannot plan it. We cannot make it happen. But we can serve in God's vineyard, and witness to the miracles around us.

Go in faith people of God as seed-bearers of the kingdom and farmers of the kind of love and mercy that only true disciples of Jesus can hope to produce. May your efforts be always those of love and grace and may God's presence ever be your guide.

Your work will be the "stuff" of God's miracles.