

“You Were Made for a Miracle: Your Gifts Are Needed”

Luke 9:1-6

How many of you woke up this morning thinking, “What miracles is God going to do through me today?” or “Another great day in the neighborhood, let’s see how God is going to use me today!” I think the problem often comes from how we think of miracles and of God. Most of us feel that miracles are beyond our capacity because we think of miracles as magic. Here is a car commercial about a little boy who is wearing a Darth Vader costume and who goes around thinking that he has magical powers: <https://youtu.be/hBuQopNu2Is>

We think that miracles are about magical or supernatural powers and so we dismiss them as things beyond our ability. People even lose their faith when they pray for something and it does not happen:

- When a loved one gets a cancer diagnosis and prayer does not produce a miracle of healing.
- When you work for justice and hope that God would intervene and release the oppressed.
- When you feel at the end of your rope and no help seems to come your way.

In a recent interview with Krista Tippet, poet Ruby Sales tells about such a moment when she lost her faith. She was marching to Montgomery, Alabama, with the 1965 civil rights march and when they got on the bridge and were faced with the violence of the authorities, she thought that God was going to intervene like God did in biblical times. She was waiting for a rescue miracle just like God parted the Red Sea before the Israelites as they escaped Pharaoh’s army. When it didn’t happen, she lost faith. It was not until later when she connected with the faith of her ancestors that she regained her faith. She learned about the power of faith from her ancestors who were enslaved and who found power through their connection to God even when their circumstances didn’t seem to change.

Miracles are about the joining together of divine love and human love. Our work on this earth is to learn to live out of that deep connection which we easily forget. Our life here is about learning to grow deeper in our spirits. Miracles are not about results and outcomes. Miracles are about being in the flow of divine and human love. Two quotes come to my mind to express this. First from Albert Einstein (screen), “There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.” The second quote is from Richard Rohr (screen): “It’s not people who see miracles who believe. No, it’s people who already believe who see things as miraculous.... You hear and you receive what your heart is already prepared to hear and receive.”

Miracles are not about mastering a skill or a level of knowledge. They are about our willingness to let go of control and to rely on the flow of divine grace each moment. That is how we can affirm that each of us are made for a miracle. That is exactly what Jesus was trying to teach the disciples when he commissioned them to go and do his work of healing. What strikes me in the story from Luke 9 is how Jesus asked his followers to go out with nothing but the clothes on their back so that they may rely completely on the hospitality of strangers. (Read Luke 9:1-9) I think that the details about having to go out

with (screen with bullet points) no money, no staff, no bag, no bread and not even an extra tunic are powerful reminders of how miracles work. The disciples could not go into those homes as those who had the gospel while their hosts were merely recipients of charity work. The divine flow does not work that way. The disciples could not be independent and powerful on their own. They needed the flow of love from their hosts. The hosts also needed to see themselves as part of the miracle. They had to share their own gifts before the miracles would take place. Everyone had to bring whatever they had to the table, but not out of a place of privilege or personal power, but out of a place of love and care for the stranger. The disciples were not to take God's love to the people. Instead, they were to uncover it there within them. God was already there with the people. What was missing was the awareness and the sharing of that love. Once love started flowing unhindered by people's pretenses of ego power, miracles took place. The disciples had not even been with Jesus that long. That was early on in his ministry with them. They had not graduated from discipleship school. They had not been part of that movement for long. This was certainly not about their skills or length of training. It was about their openness to the flow of Christ's love through practicing powerlessness and letting go. They saw Jesus' own way of life and his humility. The whole story of Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection is about the flow of love through what seems as powerlessness.

The challenge for us today in knowing and living as those who are created for a miracle is accepting our powerlessness and embracing it as a channel for God's love. One has to be in a place of powerlessness before being able to flow with the divine power. We resist that so much. We try to resist anything that threatens our sense of security or control. All of us know about those times when we feel so helpless. Imagine if Jesus was asking you to go out to do his work with no money, no bag, or no change of clothes. How would you react? That is why most of our spiritual work has to do with learning how to let go. Holding on to life so tightly is one of the greatest obstacles that stand in the way of our ability to flow with God's grace. We even learn to not trust ourselves and that inner voice which God has put in our hearts. That is why people throughout the centuries have gone on pilgrimages or out into the desert to let go of that false sense of control. Only then were they able to see with clarity the sacred in all of life.

We live in an age of distraction and speed which makes it hard for us to slow down long enough to let go. We are often filled with fear, constant restlessness, and dissatisfaction with life. But this season of Lent offers us a gift. It can be a time when we pause and remember the divine flow where life is not about our fears, needs, likes, or dislikes. Instead, Lent offers us a fresh opportunity to reclaim our deep connection to God and how God longs to flow in and through us.

The leadership of this congregation has been intentional to have our outreach and service ministries be about solidarity with the people we seek to serve. Instead of focusing on giving money from a distance, we seek to be intentional about mutuality and relationships where the flow of God's grace goes around. I would like to highlight four ministry areas that are based on the example of Jesus' sending of the disciples to the villages. As I share about each ministry, I will invite the disciples from each ministry to stand up and receive a blessing.

1. Respite Care: Once a month, a group of about 15 disciples put on a program at the church for people with dementia so that they can have a fun time of socialization while giving their caregivers a little respite. The best part about this for me is how the disciples and the guests come together as one, laughing, playing, eating, and working together. No one has the answers or the fixes to a terrible disease, but everyone has the same spirit of love to be shared with deep joy. Miracles abound!
2. Jackson School: Once a week 12 disciples from our church volunteer at Jackson Primary School to help to enhance the educational experience of children in our community. The focus is on relationships and showing care. There is no great skill involved, just the desire to be there to support the teachers and staff who work hard to nurture our young people. We know that we can't always overcome the challenges these children and teachers face, but we trust that the love that is shared makes a difference. Miracles abound!
3. Nursing Home: Once a month, a group of about 12 disciples go to the Nursing Home to offer a worship service to the residents who can't go to church. They offer companionship, music, prayer, care, and scriptures to remind people in a tough situation that God is still with them. The stories I often hear are about how the residents often bless our volunteers with so many gifts of care and encouragement. We are all helpless in the face of aging, but the power of love makes sacred even the worst of times. Miracles abound!
4. Chair Yoga and Centering Prayer: Once a week, three of our disciples offer the gift of quiet and centering through Chair Yoga and Centering Prayer. They facilitate the time by focusing on the presence of God within each of us and in the gathering of a community for love. What a great gift to offer each other the space and time to encounter the living God. Miracles abound!

These are just four examples of how God works in our midst to bring amazing miracles of love. The invitation is always before each one of us to remember that God needs our gifts for the flow of divine grace and that only when we are willing to be humble and even powerless does God's love truly flow through us to bring about miracles that change the world. Amen.