

“Joy, Wonder and Disbelieving”

Since I was a child I have read the Gospels or had them read to me. I have studied the Gospels in many methods. I have been preaching the Gospels for ten years. And yet sometimes I feel I have never seen them before. Or worse yet, having seen them before I miss the obvious and perhaps most compelling aspects.

Let's take today's scene from Luke. Jesus appears in a closed room with his disciples, much as we heard he did last week in the Gospel of John. There are some differences. For example, there is no mention of Thomas being absent from the group. Also he asks for and eats some fish in their presence, proving he is alive. Then he opens the scriptures to them just as he did to the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus. There is no breathing on them to give them the Holy Spirit as in John, because they are going to get that on Pentecost in Luke's telling of the story.

Despite the differences it would not be hard to harmonize Luke and John or at least say that they are telling the story from a different aspect. Like in the Starbucks coffee cup example I showed a few weeks back. In fact, the stories seem so similar that the compelling words that Luke uses are all but overlooked by the likes of me.

Then I read an email from a colleague in ministry and preaching. He pointed out several words that I had skimmed over. The words are “While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering.” It is not really surprising that the disciples who thought their mentor had been killed and buried were confused that he was alive and back amongst them. Of course, they feel joy and wonder and also disbelief. After all this is not your everyday occurrence.

But let's think of what is an everyday occurrence. For example, you woke up this morning. When you laid your head down to sleep last night did you know that you would awaken this morning? I presumed I would because for all of my life I have awakened after sleeping. Or how about your breath or your ability to walk without having to think through every single step you take and move you make. Good Lord, how am I putting this sentence together without having to gather the words one by one in the hopes of making some sense?

Then there is the natural world. For example, the bumblebee that was in my office which by all accounts should not be able to fly. There is the absurdity of flightless birds, and the reptiles that change color according to their surroundings. How about the flowers and trees? Despite the annual occurrence of their budding and flowering was there any reason to believe, other than routine, that it would happen again this spring?

I am surprised that we all do not go around every day in joy, wonder and disbelieving while falling over ourselves at the beauty, wonder, and joy around us.

The world and our lives are full of miracles. Perhaps you arrived here this morning angry about a discourteous driver, when your wonder might be why there was only one. Perhaps you arrived joyful this morning for a blue jay or robin you saw. Don't let my words get in the way of the joy. Perhaps you arrived wondering how you will manage this coming week with the pain you feel in your heart. It doesn't feel good I know. But thank God because the pain may lead you to a new discovery about your

true self. The self that feels pain in the heart because of your sensitivity to the world and those you love.

We live in a world of miracles. They may not always be the miracle of bodily resurrection; although there are lots of other metaphorical resurrections in this life if we are open to them. There are joys and wonders aplenty on a moment by moment basis. A beautifully sung note, the smile of a child, the touch of a friend, the taste of something good, a smell that reminds you of home...the miracles are countless.

I cannot say it any better than Walt Whitman in his poem "Miracles."

WHY! who makes much of a miracle?
As to me, I know of nothing else but miracles,
Whether I walk the streets of Manhattan,
Or dart my sight over the roofs of houses toward the sky,
Or wade with naked feet along the beach, just in the edge of the water,
Or stand under trees in the woods,
Or talk by day with any one I love—or sleep in the bed at night with any one I love,
Or sit at table at dinner with my mother,
Or look at strangers opposite me riding in the car,
Or watch honey-bees busy around the hive, of a summer forenoon,
Or animals feeding in the fields,
Or birds—or the wonderfulness of insects in the air,
Or the wonderfulness of the sun-down—or of stars shining so quiet and bright,
Or the exquisite, delicate, thin curve of the new moon in spring;
Or whether I go among those I like best, and that like me best—mechanics, boatmen,
farmers,
Or among the savans—or to the soiree—or to the opera,
Or stand a long while looking at the movements of machinery,
Or behold children at their sports,
Or the admirable sight of the perfect old man, or the perfect old woman,
Or the sick in hospitals, or the dead carried to burial,
Or my own eyes and figure in the glass;
These, with the rest, one and all, are to me miracles,
The whole referring—yet each distinct, and in its place.

To me, every hour of the light and dark is a miracle,
Every cubic inch of space is a miracle,
Every square yard of the surface of the earth is spread with the same,
Every foot of the interior swarms with the same;
Every spear of grass—the frames, limbs, organs, of men and women, and all that
concerns them,
All these to me are unspeakably perfect miracles.

To me the sea is a continual miracle;
The fishes that swim—the rocks—the motion of the waves—the ships, with men in them,
What stranger miracles are there?¹

¹ "Miracles" by Walt Whitman. Public domain.

Gene LeCouteur
Emanuel Episcopal Church
Middleburg, Virginia

8:00 a.m. & 10:30 a.m.
April 15, 2018
The Third Sunday of Easter, Year B

Love your life and your miracles of daily life. Don't waste your life by looking downward. Look ahead. Look up. Look for those things that are as assuredly miracles as the resurrection of Jesus was to the twelve. Joy and wonder in your disbelieving.