

Three Steps to a Miracle
by Rev. Dr. Durrell Watkins
Mark 6.35-43

One night Uncle Arthur was late for dinner. The phone rang and a voice on the other end of the line told my great-aunt Gladys that my great uncle had gone skinny-dipping in a public lake and had been arrested for indecent exposure. She hung up the phone and told me that Uncle Arthur had been picked up for indecent exposure so we should go ahead and have dinner. I said, “dinner? Shouldn’t we go post his bail?” She said, “No, dear. I’m sure they’ll release him for lack of evidence.” Aunt Gladys, made a decision; she acted as if things would be alright, and she shared a delicious dinner with me. It’s like she read today’s readings, isn’t it?

The scripture that Florence Scovel Shinn quotes in our first reading today comes from 2 Kings, chapter 3. In that scripture, there is a promise of rain, but no real sign of rain yet. Elisha is told that even when no rain is in sight, he would be wise to prepare for the rain. And he does. And the rain does come.

Elisha doesn’t wait for clouds, or for weather reports, or signs of confirmation. He prepares for rain, he prepares for what he needs, he prepares for success even before there is any sign of success apparent to the naked eye.

In the 2003 film *Under the Tuscan Sun*, a divorced writer has moved to Tuscany but is still very hurt about her marriage ending. She buys a big house to remodel, but one day wonders out loud why she has bothered. She doesn’t have a husband or a lover. She doesn’t have children. She wonders why she should have bought such a big house if there will never be anyone to fill the bedrooms, or if there will never be people to cook for in her big kitchen.

Her friend and realtor answers her questions by telling her the story of the railroad connecting Tuscany to the Alps. He tells her the railroad was built before there was a train that could make the journey. But they knew that one day there would be such a train, and when there was, they’d be ready. They didn’t build the railroad because there was a train; they built it because there was a need for a train, and they had faith that one day such a train would exist. And so they prepared.

The woman’s house may not yet be full, but there will be people in her life one day. And when that happens, she’ll have a place for them. Of course, as the film progresses, she makes many friends and builds a family of choice and the house is full of love and laughter and she is very glad that she bought the house even before there was an obvious reason for it.

She got the house not because she had a family, but because she wanted one and deserved one, and so she prepared to have one. There were set backs and disappointments along the way, but as she prepared for Good, Good was in time made manifest in her experience. Her preparation resulted in her dreams coming true. In fact, she realizes at the

end of the movie that her wishes have been fulfilled; she received everything she asked for, after she prepared for the fulfillment. She finally says, “unthinkably good things can happen, even late in the game.”

Her miracle began with mere preparation: the seemingly odd and pointless buying of a house, which was later filled with friends and romance and family and joy. She dug a ditch even when there was no rain. She built a track before there was a train. She prepared her consciousness for Good, and the Good came. That message is repeated today in our gospel reading, as well.

Of course, as with most stories in scripture, I think what we are seeing is more literary than literal, but we are intended to enter into the story world and to discover truths that transcend facts, truths that are still available to us, truths that can still offer us hope and empowerment in our lives.

In the story, crowds have followed Jesus and he sees that they are going to need something to eat. He instructs his disciples to minister to them, but they have a list of excuses why they can't. They have only a little bit of food and almost no money, and so what can be done? Jesus doesn't say the task will be easy, or that success will be instant, but he does say that something can be done, and he insists that his disciples do what they can. He even suggests that they stretch themselves to do what at first they think they can't be done.

How do you feed a multitude with only with only a little food and no money? Ask any Southern grandmother...it can be done! How do you summon a miracle? A miracle isn't transgressing the laws of nature. In his book, *Why Bad Things Happen to Good People*, Rabbi Harold Kushner writes, “If anything, we find proof of God precisely in the fact that laws of nature do not change. God has given us a[n]...orderly world.”

So, miracles don't amount to the Creator of the physical world breaking the laws that the Creator put in place. Miracles are a change of perception. When we see what we couldn't see before, the way we experience the world changes. That's a miracle. How is Mark's Jesus going to pull off of such a miracle? How is he going to have these thick disciples see possibilities they have so far overlooked?

1. “Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups...they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties.” Jesus made a decision. He decided that they would try. An ancient proverb says, “A journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.” Jesus makes up his mind that they will give miracles a chance. They will try. They will do what they can. They will even try to do something they previously doubted they could do. They will risk failure. They will risk ridicule. Jesus decides to make the commitment to honestly try. That's the first step toward seeing things differently. Decide.

2. After Jesus makes a decision, he then acts as if the decision he's made is possible. Does he have any doubts? Who knows? Mark doesn't tell us. Do his friends have doubts?

In Mark's imagination they do. No one makes the disciples look worse than Mark does. But in spite of any doubts Jesus may have, and in spite of the many doubts his friends seem to have, Jesus acts as if miracles are possible. He acts as if there is another way to see things, another way things can go.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "Do the thing and you will have the power." Act as if. John Wesley once doubted if he really had the kind of faith needed to preach good news. A friend of his supposedly counseled him: "Preach faith UNTIL you have it; THEN preach faith because you have it." Act as if. How many times have you lacked the courage to do something, but you did it anyway. You acted as if you had more courage than you did, the courage actually caught up to you? Act as if.

Jesus is saying, "we've decided to give this a try. Now let's at least act as if we think it might work. Put them in groups and let's get to it."

3. After Jesus decides to give miracles a chance, and chooses to act as if it really is possible to see things differently in life, then he gets people to participate in the change of perception...in the miracle. He says a prayer, and starts distributing what little they have to these small groups...he doesn't tackle the huge crowd...he has seated them in groups, and he gives a little something to each group. And in the groups, abundance begins to manifest.

There was a time when Moses tried to do everything by himself. He didn't trust people to do their share, or he wouldn't give them the opportunity to earn his trust. If he couldn't control every detail of it, it just wasn't going to happen. Meanwhile, he was growing unhappy, bitter, mean, cranky...finally his father-in-law Jethro takes him aside and says, "You're killing yourself and these people too. Cut it out already."

The actual text says, "You are not acting wisely...You will surely wear yourself out...and these people with you! You cannot do it alone." Jethro then tells Moses to divide the people into groups of tens and fifties and hundreds...sound familiar? In these smaller groups, people can minister to one another. They then can go to Moses for big decisions, but Moses is otherwise free to cast the vision, rally the masses, and lead the movement without having to hold the hand of every individual, without having to look over every shoulder.

Moses can model a miracle consciousness, but each person must do their own inner work. He must teach people how to participate in their own miracle, their own broader view of life.

"Group them together, let them minister to one another and share responsibility." This is the way to empower the people and energize the movement.

Mark has Jesus following this exact advice! When people need to be fed, he gathers them together in ways that they can minister to one another. He then shares what he has, modeling generosity. In small groups, the people who probably did not go very far from

home without a snack and some water, must start pulling out the pear they brought, or the dates, or the wine, or the water, or the crust of bread. Suddenly, in small caring groups, a spontaneous potluck breaks out.

People get to see that when we give what we have, no matter how small it may seem, if we all do what we can, faithfully, together our shared gifts create an experience of abundance. Scarcity thinking is transformed into abundance thinking, and that's the miracle. Jesus gets people together so they can encourage one another and take responsibility for their own growth and development, for their change of perception, for their miracle.

Jesus doesn't do our work for us...that wouldn't be a miracle; that would be enabling dysfunction. But Jesus does model how we can experience a miracle for ourselves.

When we decide that something is possible,
and we act as if we really believe it (even if we have some doubts),
and we give all that we can to the process without doing it for others or expecting others to do it for us, but by sharing ourselves in relationship within the larger body; then we find our view broadens and we see possibilities and opportunities we never knew existed. That three-step process leads to a miracle in Mark's story; and it will lead to a miracle in our lives.

Decide there is another way to see things. Act as if the Good you need is really possible. And then commit to the new vision by giving all you can to it. Suddenly, there is more in life than you realized before and it's all waiting to be experienced by you.

This is the good news. Amen.
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Miracles are possible.
My miracle will happen for me.
I commit to my miracle.
I am a magnet for miracles.
Thank you, God!
And so it is!

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