

WHY? Lent 2
Why Did Jesus Perform Miracles?
February 17, 2008
Steven M Conger

Matthew 16:1-4

Some Pharisees and Sadducees were on him again, pressing him to prove himself to them. He told them, "You have a saying that goes, 'Red sky at night, sailor's delight; red sky at morning, sailors take warning.' You find it easy enough to forecast the weather—why can't you read the signs of the times? An evil and wanton generation is always wanting signs and wonders. The only sign you'll get is the Jonah sign." Then he turned on his heel and walked away.

It has been an interesting week here at Ridge Church.

Monday I drove down to Indy to visit Lisa who is in the hospital and Larry her dad who has been down there for a month.

I was impressed with how well Lisa was doing — but after I left she had a set back

Thursday, was of course Valentine's Day — I spent if first with our District Superintendent as we began talking about the future of Ridge Church with Jeff and Heather announcing that they were leaving us and going back to Kansas on June 30th.

Following that visit I received a phone call from the Doctor that Lindsey has been seeing at Children's since Lindsey had some follow-up labs last week.

She informed us that Lindsey's Graves Disease — that we thought was in remission was back — and that Lindsey would have to face either surgery or radioactive iodine treatment in the near future. Happy Valentine's Day

And of course, when I turned on the TV for just a moment, I saw that there had been another shooting at a school — the fourth one in a week.

Friday as I got up and was getting dressed to walk the dog, I realized that the shooting took place at Northern Illinois University — the school I graduated from in 1982.

Also Friday I went to visit our 4 people in local hospitals (we have Lisa still in Indy) And realized that we also have two who are in poor or declining health.

But before the day was done, I drove to Kalamazoo Michigan to attend PET's (President Elect Training) for Rotary. It really was a three day event in indoctrination — but as you can tell, I am here and not there finishing up the event this morning.

Through all of this — I was focusing on the issue of MIRACLES.

Why did Jesus . . .

Why do the Gospel writers tell us that Jesus performed miracles?

But I need to back up a little bit

Thursday afternoon a young man walked into Cole Hall at Northern Illinois University.

He walked in and proceeded to begin to fire a shotgun and three handguns, killing 5 students, wounding 14 others before taking his own life.

30 years ago, I sat in that lecture hall listening to lectures on Earth Science — OK, the truth is I slept in that lecture hall — but as much as I hated that class — never once did I think that I should go out and buy a gun and begin to shoot people.

Matt Lauer made a most interesting comment Friday at the end of the piece about the latest shooting that took place. The one in our own backyard at Northern Illinois University. He said that it was: "A sad sign of the times."

Where was God in all this?

Why didn't God intervene and deliver a miracle?

That got me really thinking about what a miracle really is.

If I were to ask you to define what a miracle is — how would you do it?

Maybe something like:

A supernatural intervention which disrupts or changes the natural laws or course of events.

Is that a fair definition?

Pay attention carefully to this clip from the movie *Charlotte's Web*. In it they offer their own understanding of miracle.

What is fascinating to me is that the Latin word *miraculum* that we get miracle from means literally "something wonderful".

Let me tell you a story:

Tuesday I am leaving for Israel.

Every time I go, somebody will say to me — “Do you think that it is safe?”

I know of no incident in which a person walked into a school and began shooting.

Kathy lent me a book written by the Pastor of Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem.

Those of you who follow my blog know that I like to give little book reviews of things that I have read — but I have not reviewed *Bethlehem Besieged*, nor the National Geographic article about the situation in Bethlehem. I haven't done it because I would not be surprised to find that the Israeli IDF had been looking at my comments and I don't want any problems as I get on the El Al flight Tuesday night.

But this book is a powerful, yet disturbing look at the Israeli policy toward the Palestinian people. And, I hope you understand that when I say Palestinian people I am talking about both Christians and Muslims. Both groups are lumped together in the Israeli policy.

The religious groups in Bethlehem decided to stage a peaceful demonstration in Bethlehem to protest the Israeli policy. They decided to have a candlelight march from Christmas Lutheran Church walking to the Greek Church, going then to the Syrian Orthodox church, followed by the Islamic Mosque and ending at the church of the Nativity.

They hoped that they might get a couple hundred people to march — maybe 500 if they are lucky. This was taking place in December of 2000 ---- a few months into the current Intifada — Israel had been bombing and destroying homes in the city. Going on this march was potentially dangerous, as they did not know if Israel would attack or if Hamas (the right wing of the Palestinians) if they would try to provoke the Israeli army.

In the days leading up to the march, Rev. Raheb asked the children at their school a profound question:

“What do you think is easier, throwing a stone at a tank or lighting a candle at night?”

Of course the answer for the children was obvious — throwing a stone is more dangerous — lighting a candle is easy. With that he encouraged them to come out to the march — the children answered that there was no way that their parents would let them leave their homes after sunset.

“You see,” Rev Raheb replied, “lighting a candle at night isn’t an easy thing after all. It often requires more courage than throwing a stone, and it is certainly more meaningful.”

Over 2,500 hundred people marched that night — was that a miracle? — but neither CNN nor FOX NEWS nor the BBC bothered to cover the march. We don’t want to watch a peaceful march we want to see rocks being thrown.

Two years later — with the Intifada still going on — the population of Bethlehem experiencing 75% unemployment, Christmas Lutheran Church began a program teaching people to make stained glass angels out of the broken windows and bottles that people could find. They began to sell them on the internet and the Christian Council of Norway placed a huge order.

This is from Christmas Lutheran Church’s newsletter:

Dear sisters and brothers,

Hundreds of angels were seen during this Advent season in many congregations throughout Norway. People said those angels have a head, a body, and two wings. They were even able to touch them. Those angels were made out of glass, fragments of broken bottles thrown away or glass destroyed during the Israeli invasion of Bethlehem. Human hands picked the glass fragments from among the rubble, then they were assembled together by some of the poorest of the of the poor in the Bethlehem region at our art workshops. Ordered by the Christian Council of Norway to be sent to hundreds of congregations, those angels told all about “the hopes and fears of all the years” that people have in Bethlehem today. The broken glass pieces are a sign of the brokenness of our world, and it is also the reason for God to incarnate. Through His incarnation he brought the divine and the human back together, He picked what seems to be worthless and hopeless and transformed it into a beautiful and whole creation. It is this incarnation, which took place here in Bethlehem two thousand years ago, which gives us the strength to continue to look for broken lives and hopes and to transform them through art into angels, messengers of justice, peace and dignity.

Is that a miracle?

I have come to understand that the Gospel writers tell of Jesus performing miracles, not because he broke the natural laws (which he very well may have done) but because you and I need to know that we can overcome the evil, the bad things that happen to us.

God does not stop Tsunami's or hurricanes. Nor does God encourage nor stop people who are ill from buying guns and walking into a classroom and killing our children.

But what God does do — is give us HOPE.
The miracle is that we don't have to live in the darkness.
That we don't have to accept the violence that predominates our society.

We can change — if we are willing to take the broken pieces and make them into angels.

Isn't that the message that Jesus is giving us when he is telling in Matthew's Gospel:

Matthew 16:1-4

Some Pharisees and Sadducees were on him again, pressing him to prove himself to them. He told them, "You have a saying that goes, 'Red sky at night, sailor's delight; red sky at morning, sailors take warning.' You find it easy enough to forecast the weather—why can't you read the signs of the times? An evil and wanton generation is always wanting signs and wonders. The only sign you'll get is the Jonah sign." Then he turned on his heel and walked away.

It is up to us — to take the message of Jesus — to take the love of Jesus and make a miracle.