

Mark 1:29-39
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 Miraculous. Normal. Normal Miraculous

May the God...

Good Morning!

Jesus is preaching in the synagogue in Capernaum, suddenly a man possessed by a demon cries out: "Have you come to destroy us?"

"Silence," Jesus says.

And then commands the demon, "Come out of him."

The unclean spirit, shakes the man, screams and leaves the man.

Everyone in the room is shaken, questioning and amazed.

News of the miracles that Jesus performs begins to spread.

When Jesus is done in the synagogue, he goes with James and John to Simon and Andrew's home. Simon's mother-in-law is in bed with a fever.

Jesus goes to her, attends to her, takes her hand, and heals her.

Then she cooks dinner and serves her son-in-law and his friends a meal.

That same evening, as word gets out that Jesus of Nazareth is at Simon's house, crowds from the town begin to form, standing two and three deep around Simon's front door. They bring with them, to Jesus, any and all of their friends and relatives who need to be healed.

Jesus attends to them all. He casts out many demons, cures the sick healing them miraculously.

Early the next morning, he's nowhere to be found. He's left the house long before the sun cracks the sky, he's gone to a deserted place to pray.

And then, only after his prayer does he set out again to heal. Think about it, only after eating the meal Simon's mother-in-law serves, does Jesus begin again to cure the ones who approach him.

Teaching in the synagogue, miraculously healing, eating dinner, miraculously healing, praying the next morning, before beginning again to miraculously heal.

The movement of this scripture passage: everyday events precede miraculous cures, the normal to the amazing, the miraculous to the normal, moments of miracles, then a return to normal. Jesus heals Simon Peter's mother-in-law, then they eat the meal she cooks for them, then he casts out demons, cures the ailing people of the town, and the next morning he is off to a deserted place to say his prayers.

Miraculous. Normal. Normal Miraculous.

So often when we look at scripture, when we study the Gospels and their depiction of the life and times of Jesus we tend to focus on the extraordinary, the miraculous and overlook the normal, the mundane, the bit by bit work and power of everyday life, relationships and prayer that provide the foundation, the canvas for all of his miracles.

We do that all the time don't we? Always being drawn to the bright and shiny. Focusing on the amazing moment of change and transformation and neglecting, almost leaving in the shadows all of the work that precedes the momentous moments of change.

Let's think about Rosa Parks. The New York Times had a fascinating article on how her story is frequently portrayed. It's often told as a solitary moment, when a tired woman filled with resolve sat down in the front of a bus and refused to move. And thus the spark for the Montgomery Bus Boycott was ignited, fueling the momentum of the Civil Rights movement.

When in reality Mrs. Parks was not new to activism. She had spent two decades before that moment organizing for criminal justice reform, voter registration and the end of segregation. She continually pushed her local chapter of the NAACP to be more activist.

She was not the first person arrested for refusing to give up her seat. A younger, feisty 15 year old named Claudette Colvin was arrested the summer before Rosa Parks. But the organizers of the would be movement believed that Claudette would not be the right test case so they waited. Then on that December night when Rosa Parks, a middle aged experienced activist was arrested the networks that had been slowly and painstakingly constructed over the years were called into action.

A boycott was announced for that Monday. It was a massive success. So they kept it going, using the networks in place to continue on and on, giving the Civil Rights Movement a platform it needed to push for concrete change. The normal bit by bit, day after day work of developing and nurturing relationships that led in that concentrated time span to amazing almost miraculous change.

Over and over again Jesus returns to daily activities to sustain and nurture his soul: food and drink with friends and robust, intense, regular prayer; normal activities undergirding miracles.

In this season of Epiphany, in this time in our world and in our country when we are so in need of miraculous change I invite you to link the power of Christianity, and the fierce attraction of Jesus of Nazareth not so much to his moments of otherworldly interruptions, but rather to his day by day commitment to the bit by bit work of life: eating, praying, loving, listening, doing and praying again. Jesus on Nazareth, the Son of God, did not lurch from one miracle to another, instead all he did was grounded in relationships and prayer, daily, hourly putting in the time, the attention, to ensure that

his soul was saturated with care. Friends, change, transformation and miracles do not come out of thin air, but are the result of deep work and abiding connections.

How are we doing this work? In this wretched pandemic, in the bleak mid-winter how are we attending to our souls by attending to others? How and when and where and how often are we turning to God? Saying our prayers, whispering our needs? Confessing our sins turning to God and others for help? How and when and where are we setting aside our cares and fears and reaching out to others, listening, learning, loving, eating, drinking and gathering even if it is only of Zoom? This is the time, now more than ever for us to attend to normal, to create and prepare for the miraculous.

The miraculous moments of change and transformation are much more readily attained when we like Jesus attend to the day in and day out, morning by morning moments of the life we are living. This is our gift, our daily prayer. Amen.