

6th Sunday of Easter
May 26, 2019
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Show Me a Miracle

Acts 14:8–18 (NIV84)

In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked. ⁹ He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed ¹⁰ and called out, “Stand up on your feet!” At that, the man jumped up and began to walk. ¹¹ When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, “The gods have come down to us in human form!” ¹² Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. ¹³ The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them. ¹⁴ But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: ¹⁵ “Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. ¹⁶ In the past, he let all nations go their own way. ¹⁷ Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.” ¹⁸ Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Have you ever heard someone say or even thought yourself, “If God would just show me a miracle, then...” A skeptic may say, “If God would cure my wife’s cancer, then I will believe in him.” An atheist might say, “If God would just write my name in the stars, then I will believe.” A Christian might say, “If God would just get me out of this financial mess, then I won’t give up on him.” Maybe Christians would like God to show a very public miracle in our country so that people stop arguing about religion and believe in the one, true God. Just show me a miracle and I will believe.

Maybe this desire to see miracles is why some are drawn to so called miracle workers or faith healers today. People want to believe in miracles and especially want to believe that God will perform a personal miracle for them. Therefore they treat faith healers like celebrities and send them lots of money, hoping to receive a miracle of their own. Many people misunderstand miracles today and the same was true at the time of the apostle Paul. God did reveal himself through miracles but he also used other ways to reveal himself to people then and now. We don’t have to ask God to show me a miracle, because he has already revealed himself to us in Christ.

Many Misunderstand Miracles

In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked. ⁹ He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed ¹⁰ and called out, “Stand up on your feet!” At that, the man jumped up and began to walk. ¹¹ When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, “The gods have come down to

us in human form!” ¹² *Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker.* ¹³ *The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them.*

Last Sunday, we read about Paul and Barnabas in Psidian Antioch. They preached the gospel of Christ and the word of the Lord worked faith in the hearts of some Jews and Gentiles. But many of the Jews opposed the gospel and encouraged the leading people of the city to drive Paul and Barnabas away. The missionaries were not popular with the crowds in Antioch. So they fled to Iconium and then went to Lystra where they encounter the opposite problem. In Lystra they become too popular with the crowds. Instead of driving them away, the Gentiles of Lystra want to worship them as gods.

There was a legend told about Lystra relating to the false gods, Zeus and Hermes. The story says that these gods had visited the city of Lystra but no one recognized them or welcomed them. Well, the people of Lystra were not going to make this mistake again. When they see and hear about a great miracle happening in their city, they immediately welcome the miracle workers as Zeus and Hermes. They completely misunderstand the miracle that God performed through the apostle Paul.

The Lord allowed Paul to heal a man who had never walked in order to confirm the message Paul was proclaiming. Luke does not record Paul's message to the people when he arrived in Lystra, but we can be sure the message focused on Christ. Paul would have been telling them about the God who sent his Son to die to pay for sins and rose to give eternal life to all who believe. The gospel message had its effect. At least one in the crowd believed, the crippled man. Paul could tell that he believed, either by the man's expression or by a God-given ability to see this man's heart. Then he healed him.

There are really two miracles here. First, the man was brought from unbelief to faith. That is a miracle of the Holy Spirit working through the gospel message. The second miracle was that the man who had never walked began to walk and kept on walking. Certainly both miracles are personal. One saved a man from an eternity apart from God and all that is good. The other helped a man physically for this lifetime. Both served to confirm the powerful message of the gospel. Jesus Christ is the true Son of God who offered himself in the place of sinful man.

But the crowds misunderstood and gave glory to men instead of to Christ. It still happens. People glorify movie stars, athletes, singers, politicians and celebrities of every type. Entertainers and athletes may give us temporary joy in life but only God can give a joy and peace that lasts beyond this lifetime. People who look first and only to politicians and celebrities to solve the problems in their lives are missing out on the peace that surpasses all understanding that is found through faith in Christ. And when we ask God for a miracle to make a life better on this earth, we are misunderstanding the primary purpose for miracles. Miracles point to the truth of God's Word and especially point to Christ. Secondly, miracles helped people on the earth.

We don't need God to show us a miracle for us to trust in Christ. That miracle has already been accomplished when the Holy Spirit gave us faith. And the Lord reveals himself in more than just miracles.

God Reveals Himself in More than Miracles

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bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. ¹⁶ In the past, he let all nations go their own way. ¹⁷ Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.” ¹⁸ Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them.

The crowd and the priests of Zeus were intent on welcoming the gods whom the people had not welcomed in the past. They were going to sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas no matter what the evidence showed them, no matter what Paul and Barnabas said or did to show them that they were just men. They were also ignoring the evidence for the one, true God.

Paul tells them to “turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them.” Just look at the evidence all around us that our God lives. Look at the amazing creatures on the earth and in the seas and marvel at the God who made them. Look into the heavens and see the controlled fusion reactions that are the stars and praise the God who made them. Look into a microscope and see the cells that make up living creatures. One does not need to see a miracle to believe there is a God. Just look at what exists and know that God made it.

Paul continues, “He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.” Some may think that God is being too kind recently in providing more rain than we really want. However, if God did not provide rain, we would soon be begging for rain. Remember who Paul is talking to – unbelievers who worship Zeus and Hermes. But God is kind to all people by providing food and even joy on this earth. Think about that! God has not promised that this life will be a succession of joy filled days. Because of our rebellion against God, no one on this earth deserves even an hour of joy on this earth. But God is kind and gives joy at times to us even in this world cursed by sin. We don’t need to see a miracle to know that God is kind. He sends rain, feeds us and even gives us times of joy.

God has revealed himself most clearly in the person of Jesus Christ. Unlike the stories of Zeus and Hermes who took on the appearance of humans, the one and only Son of God became human. Christ does not just look like us, he is like us in every way but without sin. Though he performed many miracles, many of his own people would not recognize him as the Savior promised by the prophets. The people of Lystra wanted to sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas but Christ did not become human to be served by sinful men. Jesus became human to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. Christ did not turn stones into bread when he was hungry in the wilderness. He did not come down from the cross and destroy those who put him there. He humbled himself to death, even death on a cross so that all sinners can stand before God with their sins removed, pay in full by Christ. Then he performed a great and mighty miracle and rose from the dead just as he told his disciples he would do.

God does not need to show us a miracle for us to put our trust in him. He created this world and all that is in it. He kindly provides for the people of this world. He gives times of joy. He gave his Son who died and then rose again to secure our eternal salvation. And he changed our hearts from unbelief to faith. What other miracles do we need?

Amen.