

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Place an open bible and lighted candle at the center of your group. Take turns naming ordinary miracles.

LEADER: Are green leaves turning scarlet and gold a miracle?

All: God's creativity amazes us.

LEADER: Is the power of song to unite many as one a miracle?

All: Our one song carries away our single voices.

LEADER: Are the tastes of apples, sweet or tart, their crunch or munch, miracles?

All: We wonder at all Earth produces.

LEADER: Are the healing words of a friend a miracle?

All: We wonder at all that carries us beyond ourselves.

LEADER: Is having a longstanding animosity turn to friendship a miracle?

All: Sharing God's power to heal is a wow.

LEADER: Is our love for others a miracle?

All: We share God's creative power to give life.

SUNDAY

by SUNDAY

A wise counselor challenged me to start finding ten things every day I was thankful for. Ten seemed a lot at first, but practicing gratitude changed me. I began to see differently and remember bits of beauty, another editor's insight, an unexpected kindness. Plus, others began to appreciate me in return.

In her book *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We Are in Without Going Crazy*, Joanna Macy reports studies that show we are more likely to help people to whom we are grateful. Gratitude builds trust because it marks times we have been able to count on one another. Expressing gratitude plays forward; it creates a widening spiral of helping, trust, and cooperation.

Macy also thinks gratitude prevents consumer values. It delights in what one has rather than what one doesn't have. It leads to satisfaction and joy in one another. Gratitude is an antidote to depression. A life of gratitude creates a reservoir to tap into when things don't go well. One can remember and cherish all one does have.

Being alive calls us to appreciate the Creator. Evolution deepens the story of God's creative love in which we live. We see with eyes that have evolved over millions of years in creatures that sought light. Our stem cells contain the

memory of God's love unfolding. A documentary takes us inside the womb to see the cells unfolding and amaze us with the miracle of life.

To be part of giving life gives parents a moment in the evolution of all that is. The birth of a child takes them to a place of awe and closeness to God. The child immediately breathes in the oxygen that plants and trees make every day out of sunlight. No longer is the umbilical cord the child's lifeline. Our lungs tie us to the outside world we share with all that squirms, flies, blooms, and in each of us says thank you.

● What are 10 things you are grateful for today?



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GOSPEL

Faith and gratitude are miracles.



NARRATOR: On his journey to Jerusalem Jesus went through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten lepers met him. They stood far off, raised their voices, and spoke to him.

LEPERS: Jesus, master, have compassion on us.

NARRATOR: Jesus saw them.

JESUS: Go and show yourselves to the priests.

NARRATOR: On their way they found they were cleansed. One of them seeing that he had been

healed, turned back, praising God in a loud voice. He fell at Jesus' feet, thanking him. This man was a Samaritan.

JESUS: Weren't ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Did none return to give glory to God but this man who is not of our country?

NARRATOR: Then Jesus spoke to the man.

JESUS: Arise and go. Your faith has healed you.

Luke 17:11-19

What stirs you to amazement? What prompts your wow?

Common wisdom sees proof Jesus is God in the miracles he works. Certainly we see in Jesus' actions God's intent to heal and give life to people in need. Many in the crowds believe in Jesus as they hear his teachings and see him heal and forgive people. However, others don't believe. They become critics and opponents. Jesus' miracles threaten some religious officials and teachers who see Jesus claiming authority that belongs to God alone.

The gospels don't document Jesus' miracles to the standards of today's historians or scientists or even to answer our own questions. Today we want more complete diagnoses of

the illnesses. Are the demons afflictions such as mental illness or epilepsy or addictions that take us over, possess us?

Those who hand on stories about Jesus are believers who want us to believe, too. Miracle stories make claims we can only verify in our own experience. Does God act in our lives today? What power does faith in Jesus have to heal and free me? Or, is Jesus' ministry like King Arthur's Camelot, a time like no other now lost in the mists of history, an inspiring story?

What really happens in a miracle? In Sunday's gospel nine of the ten lepers disappear from the scene and leave no clue how being healed has affected them. How does

physical healing affect people spiritually or how does spiritual healing affect us bodily?

Physical healing doesn't make the nine lepers grateful people. What is the power of faith to transform us as whole persons? As people who never knew Jesus face to face became believers, they must have wondered if faith in Jesus had the same healing and freeing power that he had in person.

In Sunday's miracle story Jesus never touches the ten lepers but instead tells them to go to the priests, who have the power to certify they are healed and can rejoin society. On Jesus' words alone they set out and discover on their way they are healed. Frequently miracles stories end with Jesus affirming, "Your faith has healed you?"

● How and where does God act in our world and in my life?

Miracle stories follow simple patterns or literary forms that are easy to recognize in the gospels. Most of us use literary forms without thinking about it. Many jokes follow familiar patterns—little kids' knock-knock jokes; good news/bad news jokes; jokes with sets of three events or three characters such as a rabbi, a minister, and a priest.

At least three characters appear in each gospel miracle story—a person in need, the miracle worker, and a witness. The plots follow a simple, four-step pattern:

1. Jesus, the miracle worker, meets a person in need;

2. The person in need pleads for help or the person's parents or friends ask for help;

3. Jesus works a wonder;

4. The person in need recognizes Jesus has healed or freed him or her. Witnesses react with amazement or rejection.

The scenes may include more than the essential three main characters. A person in need may have friends or family along who witness the miracle. Disciples, crowds, and opponents witness some scenes. Crowds



and critics sometimes doubt Jesus has the authority or power to help, heightening the impact of the miracle.

How Jesus works the wonder may vary. He may touch the person in need, proclaim a sick person well in words, command an evil spirit to leave a possessed person, or pray to God for the person.

● What is typical about the miracle story that forms Sunday's gospel?

● What parts of the story are unusual and break the pattern?

Sunday's gospel follows the pattern until near the end when only one of the ten lepers returns to praise God and thank Jesus. This twist probes how the physical healing affects the ten within themselves. Does the miracle lead to faith or require faith? Is the Samaritan the only believer? Is he grateful because he is whole or does he bring a grateful attitude to the miracle?

Luke also uses the miracle story to ask why many Jewish people who expect a messiah don't recognize him when he comes and why many people of other nations, who had no preparation for his coming, believe Jesus is from God. Luke probes the mystery of why the same sign of God's presence—healing from leprosy—leads a Samaritan

man to believe in Jesus and nine to remain under the law of Moses.

● How does attitude affect healing? How has faith worked to make you whole in your life?

The Sisters of St. Joseph that minister in Hawaii revere St. Damien and St. Mother Marianne and advise never to use the "L" word



to identify those with Hanson's disease. The "L" word describes not just a disease but a history of making sick people into outsiders isolated from other humans.

Those with skin diseases in the gospel and those on Molokai suffered not only their disease but their isolation from others and from hope. Perhaps the other nine were celebrating with their families. Today doctors can cure Hanson's disease in weeks. Still we define and profile other human beings by appearance.

● Who are those today that we banish from our circles and society?

● Who do we regard as too dangerously contagious to be in our company?

● What do you think the nine people who didn't thank Jesus are doing?



What are God's boundaries?

The prophets Elijah and Elisha lived in the mid 800s B.C. Elisha succeeded Elijah as prophet in the northern kingdom of Israel. There are many miracle stories about them (1 Kings 17—21; 2 Kings 2—9). In 2 Kings 5 Elisha cures Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army, of leprosy.

A little girl from Israel captured in a raid tells Naaman's wife that a prophet of her country can cure his leprosy. The king of Aram sends Naaman to the king of Israel with thousands of gold and silver pieces and a letter that says, "Cure my servant."

The king of Israel panics and senses an international conflict in the making. When Elisha gets word, he is nonplused. "Let him come and find out there is a prophet in Israel," he says.

Like Sunday's gospel, this Old Testament miracle story is about much more than the miracle.

It's about where God is, who are real prophets, and how national boundaries affect God's power.

Namaan is ready and willing to meet any test Elisha requires of him. But Elisha asks nothing.

He sends Naaman to bathe seven times in the Jordan River. This seems too humble an act to the great commander. He says he could have stayed at home and bathed in a Syrian river. His servants reason with him to do this simple thing.

Elisha heals Naaman.

Naaman went down and plunged into the Jordan seven times at the word of Elisha, the man of God. His flesh became again like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

He returned with his whole retinue to the man of God. On his arrival he stood before him and said, "Now I know there is no God in all the earth except in Israel. Please accept a gift from your servant."

"As God lives whom I serve, I will not take it," Elisha replied. Though Naaman urged him to take it, he refused.

Naaman said, "If you will not accept, please give your servant two mule-loads of earth, for I will no longer offer holocaust or sacrifice to any other god but the Lord."

2 Kings 5.14-17

Naaman's request for dirt from Israel shows he thinks of Israel's God as not quite universal. He associates God's power with

the place where this God is powerful. To worship Israel's God back in Syria, Naaman must have earth from Israel.

Elisha refuses Naaman's gifts. A true prophet does not profit from using God's power.

- **Where do you think God is?**
- **What steps does Namaan take in his process of coming to faith in Israel's God? How are they like our own development as believers?**

PRAY

Be quiet for a few minutes to recall a miracle that has happened in your life.

LEADER: Let us join in this prayer from the Talmud: Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief.

ALL: Do justly, now.

Love mercy, now.

Walk humbly, now.

LEADER: You are not obligated to complete the work,

ALL: but neither are we free to abandon it. Amen.



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