

## Easter 2-B

4/11/21

*John 20:19-31*

Expect a miracle! You remember that catchphrase? It was quite popular several years ago. It got some pushback from mainstream Christians and rightly so because it could pretty easily turn into a kind of feel good gospel, as in “Just think positive and everything will be great.” Or, “Expect a miracle and you’ll get rich and successful.” It could become a kind of magical thinking that everything will be super-duper if we just have the right frame of mind. Which discounts people’s real suffering.

But, on the other hand, in the light of the resurrection, to expect a miracle could be a good description of what it is to the Easter miracle, that life is stronger than death, love is stronger than hate, hope is stronger than fear. Not “feel good theology,” but faith in the resurrection. So, in that sense I think it’s good to expect miracles.

I’ve been reading a book by an Episcopal priest and writer Cynthia Bourgeault, who says that working on being open to seeing the miracles around us is really an age-old spiritual discipline, a kind of prayer. I think that this is what Jesus himself is talking about when he says so often during Advent: “stay awake!” “keep alert!” “be on your guard!” Christ is coming.

That’s the greatest miracle of all: Jesus’ resurrection, which, in this season of Eastertide, is a particular focus for us.

Today we are hearing about it from John’s gospel. A little different from Mark – whom we’ve been hearing from during Holy Week and Easter. As we know, each of the evangelists has a slightly different point of view. In John’s gospel, for example, the women didn’t run away from the tomb in fear when they found it empty; in fact, in John’s version there’s only one woman, Mary Magdalene. She went to the tomb alone, found it empty and ran straight back to tell the other apostles about it immediately. Then she took Peter and John, and barreled straight back to the tomb for another look. After they had left shaking their heads, Mary stayed. There, Mary met two angels sitting where the body of Jesus had been, and then turning, saw Jesus himself. She met the risen Christ face to face in the cemetery, in John’s telling; she was right in the middle of the miracle. Actually

spent some there before going back to the house where the others were still hiding, and told them what she had seen.

But before they can even process what she has said, here we are in today's reading: Jesus appears to them too, even though the room was locked up tight, and stands among them. Miracle! He calms their fears, he breathes his Holy Spirit on them, with the gift of his peace, and he gives them a mission. This is the beginning of the church in John's gospel. Essentially, Jesus is founding the church this first night after he was raised, beginning to build it on these disciples. Which in itself is miracle because we have come to know that these guys are not the sharpest tools in the shed. Or the most faithful ones. Yet they are ones that Jesus chooses. That should make us feel good, since he chooses us too. Miracle!

Now, I'm not saying Mary or the others were expecting a miracle that night. I mean they seem pretty gob smacked by the whole thing. Jesus just showed up without any warning, and we know that's how he works sometimes. In the gospels Jesus healed people by complete surprise sometimes out of nowhere. They weren't expecting it all. He forgave people's sins who weren't looking for him, didn't have faith in him or even know who he was. I think of the blind man whom he healed at the city gate just to show God's glory to the world. Or the woman caught in adultery who he saved from stoning because Jesus miraculously made all her accusers just fade away. I don't think she saw that coming.

So we know Jesus will surprise us. I've myself been overwhelmed by graciousness from people when I never would have expected it. Beautiful kindness and generosity for no reason that I could see except that they loved Jesus and they wanted to share it. Maybe you have had that happen, or even surprised someone else with that kind of miracle.

On the other hand, I think it's fine to expect a miracle. Once we've heard the news that Jesus is alive, and that he's in us and among us, what would keep us from trying to get in on as much of it as possible? Why not expect a miracle? I don't mean take it for granted, but be on the lookout.

I think that's what good old Thomas does in this story. I mean, I just think he wanted some of what the others got. He doesn't want a second hand resurrection or a vicarious relationship with Jesus, people telling him about it, he wants a real one. So put your hand in my side and put your finger here in my hands, Jesus says. Go for it. And Thomas goes for it, and he gets it. "My Lord and my God!" he says.

So I'm not saying that expecting a miracle is the whole basis of our faith life. I mean, Jesus does say "Blessed are those who have not seen and have come to believe." I'm just asking, why not be open to it? Be ready to be surprised even. A man finds a treasure in a field, a long lost son comes home, a woman looks for a coin and she finds it. I think these are the miracles in the making. They are things that make the angels rejoice. And they are all around us, ready for us to be a part of them.

But whether we expect a miracle or whether miracles take us unawares, the good news is that the greatest miracle of all, for us, has happened, it has changed the lives of more people than we can count. And it continues to do so. The resurrection of our Lord, which we celebrate today and every Sunday, sets the stage for many more miracles to come.