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MIRACLES AFTER THE RESURRECTION

by Rick Carlberg

Acts 3:12-19; 1 John 3:1-7; Luke 27:36b-48

I am sure there is some significance to the number, but Jesus was seen on Earth for 40 days after his resurrection. It was on the 40th day that he ascended to heaven at Bethany, the town where the Mount of Olives is, surrounded by his disciples. It was the last of the miracles that Jesus performed on Earth when he was physically present to do it.

According to my *NIV Study Bible*, Jesus appears 11 times after his resurrection, and these are documented in 21 New Testament passages in six books: all **four gospels**, the **Book of Acts** and **1st Corinthians**. Some of these appearances were before as few as one person to more than 500 people, apparently all of them believers in the divinity of Christ. Each appearance is a miracle in itself, with a resurrected Jesus eating, talking or healing in the world.

In today's Lectionary reading we have two sets of miracles, one from the **Gospel of John** that involves one of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus and the other from **The Book of Acts**, where Peter has just performed a miracle. Let's take a look at both of them. We will then come back to our third reading today, **1st John**.

Our **Luke** passage is immediately after the walk to Emmaus, where I sense Jesus has a sense of humor. He is calmly walking with two of his disciples, one of them named Cleopas, discussing what happened – feigning ignorance of the week's events. These two disciples are moping around, apparently depressed that Jesus is dead and they cannot find the body. It is not until they break bread at the end of the day's journey they realize who they have been walking with. After Jesus disappears before their eyes, they jump up and return to Jerusalem to tell the remaining 11 disciples. They begin telling the disciples what happened to them when Jesus appears, interrupting them. It is the same encounter as we had from the gospel of John last week. This is where today's gospel lesson from **Luke** starts.

As we heard last week in the John reading, his first words are “Peace be with you.” This was a normal, traditional greeting, but it takes on additional meaning since the resurrection. It must have been reassuring since he must be on a different plain of existence, able to appear in locked rooms. He sees they are a bit troubled, so to make them feel comfortable, he asks them to touch him. While they do not do that, he asks for something to eat... and they give him some fish. While eating he begins an important message about why he got to be in this position before them. He still has marks in his wrists, feet and side.

He is before them because the scripture has to be fulfilled. **Psalm 22, Isaiah 53, Jonah 1** all refer to the messiah’s suffering, with three days passing between his physical death and resurrection. He points out that they have seen it and now it is their time to make this known to the world. This story is continued into the first chapter of **Acts**. In this chapter Jesus gives them the game plan: they must begin spreading the good news in Jerusalem, expand into Judah then the rest of the world.

These miracles continue beyond Chapter 1 of the **Book of Acts**. The power of miracles is now in the hands of the disciples, with Peter performing one on a crippled beggar in today’s reading. He gets him to stand up and walk in a public area: the temple in Jerusalem during the busy mid-afternoon. This catches the attention of passersby. They are looking with stunned amazement about what just happened. They know this beggar. He is not supposed to be walking. This is where the **Acts** scripture of today begins.

Peter does not mince words. He lays into these onlookers with what I perceive to be outright anger, at least some irritation. Why? Because it was the people the like of these that plotted against Jesus and had him killed. Now they look with amazement that the miracles continue. For what we know that crippled beggar who Peter healed with the help of the Holy Spirit was one who called for the death of Jesus. He healed him not by his will, but by his faith in Jesus Christ. There was no negotiation; there was no argument. The man was going to get up and walk, which he did. End of discussion. The man not only walks, he begins to jump around in many areas of the Temple court.

After he finishes chastising the onlookers, Peter is conciliatory. He reminds them that they acted out of ignorance. So did their rulers. He asks them to change their hearts, turn to God and have their sins wiped away.

Do you see the common thread of the **Luke** and **Acts** reading today? The miracles are attention getters. The real message, the punch line, is to turn your heart, your mind, your very being to God. All is forgiven; all will be well. You can be the person God wants you to be. You can act as God wants you to act. You can give others hope as God changes your behavior.

So what does that make us? That makes us God's children... and that is where our reading from **1 John** picks up. Before we look at our **1 John** reading, I want to give some lite background on why **1 John** was written, so we have some context of today's seven verses. This book was written toward the end of John's life, somewhere between 85 and 95 AD, some 55 to 65 years after the death and resurrection of Christ. The young Christian church was facing its first theological challenges, heresies, particularly Gnosticism, a secret knowledge that few possessed. There were many tentacles to it, including a separation of the physical from the spiritual being. Apparently there was a belief that the individual could sin in their earthly physical body, but keep their spirit clean. Very tempting isn't it? So, John writes this letter to the churches of Asia Minor to try to stop this in its tracks. The first two chapters of **1 John** set the stage for our reading today, which focus on our behavior as a child of God.

Let's look at what being a child of God means. First, it means the world really does not know us, really know us in a spiritually intimate way. That is due to the world not knowing Jesus. Now, we are physically children of our earthly parents. Becoming a child of God requires two things: 1) Becoming aware of the grace of God, freely given and 2) our acceptance of it. Remember, it takes a conscious act of acceptance to be a child of God. But it remains something foreign to much of the world. Our behaviors, our choices in life, do matter to our spiritual father.

1 John goes on to talk about knowing God when he returns. It sounds like we will not be like Cleopas, walking to Emmaus for hours on end. We do not know when that is, but will know him because we are his children. This is due to the hope we have in the grace given us, a hope that purifies us.

So here is the bottom line of my message today: Being a child of God is the real miracle. We do not have to perform miracles like Peter. We do not have to appear in closed rooms as Jesus did. But we do have to be a good child of our creator, focusing on how we should lead our lives, lives guided

by the Holy Spirit. Do not let the world's expectations of you get in the way of your relationship with God. There are many temptations out there and with our highly connected world they are easily found. Stay focused on God and what he expects of you. Do not be like the Gnostics of old who thought you could get away with it, to have your cake and eat it too. Our body and spirit are one, only to be separated at our physical death. Be the miracle God intends you to be.

Amen

Benediction:

Go out into the world as the miracle God wants you to be. Give hope where there is none. Make peace where there is none. Serve others not being served. May the grace, love and peace of Jesus Christ be with all of you, now and forever. Go in peace, knowing we have a new life in Christ to do his will on Earth. Amen.