

SAINT THOMAS CHURCH

Fifth Avenue · New York City

Sunday, June 14, 2026

The Third Sunday After Pentecost

Festal Eucharist

11:00 am

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A Sermon by

The Rev. Mark Schultz

on

Exodus 19:2-8a; Romans 5:1-8; Matthew 9:35-10:8

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The Wellspring of Wonder

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Where do miracles come from? Where do miracles come from?

In a world so achingly desperately in need of the miraculous Where do miracles come from?

When I was much younger, about in fifth or sixth grade

I began a lifelong interest, fascination, obsession, what have you

With the Book of Revelation. It was the first book of the Bible I read straight through. And it was probably a mistake.

It was terrifying. I had nightmares of monstrous beasts looming over our cul-de-sac Monsters coming, Godzilla-like, out of the ocean.

Monsters descending on the food court of the mall. Monsters everywhere. Angels, too, though, tons of them.

And when the adult Bible Study at my church focused on Revelation, I insisted on going. I wanted to know I wasn't alone in my fear and fascination.

I wanted to know more about the shape of what was coming.

What might be coming. I wanted to know what to expect. And was I wrong in expecting it.

I was put in a small group to discuss with others: was Revelation describing a series of future events Or was it focused primarily on John's own day, on the various political, religious, cultural currents Swirling about in the late first century. And we decided the latter: it was to do with John's own day. Revelation, we announced, to the group, when the groups were sharing,

was a symbolic commentary (laced with hope and hopefulness, the promise of salvation, renewal)

a symbolic commentary on the parlous condition of the Church within the Roman Empire that asserted the sovereignty of God in the midst of a world inimical to the Loving God and to loving witness to him (might feel familiar)

Ending with the destruction of evil and the triumph of the good.

That is a reading of the text, and by most scholarly estimations, not an incredibly bad one. You can imagine that, for a boy in fifth or sixth grade, for whom Revelation had hitherto been nightmare fuel That working out this interpretation with others would have been a great relief. And it was. It was also a colossal disappointment.

I wanted to believe that the world was capable of producing the fantastical. I wanted to believe that monsters were possible.

I wanted to believe that wonder, even in a form that was terrifying, Was a valence of the world. I wanted to know that a real life, spectacular miracle was possible in the midst of the strip malls and commerce of the late 20th century Inland Empire of Southern California That I could see the heavens rolled back like a scroll, and the angels of God flooding the world with dreadful splendor

And a City, Bright and Glorious with a Glistering Luster bursting from within Descending to the earth with awe and majesty.

Instead...it looked like Revelation was just a psychedelic cypher for ancient history. And the world would continue in its apparently clockwork logical reasonableness

Which has a dreadfulness and a deadly inexorability to it more terrible than any visionary monster

In part because it excludes the wonderful and drains the mystery from the cosmos.

There's a tendency to believe that a world without wonder is more real than a world with it. So while I didn't reject our interpretation, way back then, of Revelation wholesale

Didn't and don't (it has a lot to say to us) I suspected it didn't tell the whole story.

There must be more. There was more. There is more. There is wonder.

And our Gospel today confirms it, discloses its source. Shows us where it is that real miracles come from And confirms that the world is, in fact, prodigally, prodigiously, profoundly Wonderful

Even when-and-as it appears to be so prodigally, prodigiously, profoundly Broken.

In our reading from Matthew, Jesus commissions the apostles and sends them out to do two things Empowers them to do two fundamental things: preach the nearness of the Kingdom, and demonstrate that nearness through signs, miracles. For our Gospeller, this order is not accidental. Signs are meant to follow preaching.

Preaching prepares the way for signs to be legible, readable, understandable.

In fact, preaching is pre-eminent in Matthew, there is no miracle without a prior teaching. The Sermon on the Mount, beginning in chapter 5,

precedes the narration of a catalogue of miracles in chapter 8

And here, at the end of chapter 9, that movement from sermon to miracle is summarized with

"Jesus went about all the cities and villages,

teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people."

Now, you may think to yourself: "that's all well and good for you, Father Preacher, But I'm not called to preach

Also...you preach so much, where are your miracles."

Now leaving aside that not every Christian is called to be a wonder worker I want to insist that all Christians are called to preach.

You don't need to be in a pulpit to preach.

Your life is meant to bear witness to what you believe.

The faith is not an abstract collection of propositions seeking our mere intellectual assent The faith is a living reality of relationship that is meant to live in you

In your mind, in your heart, in your body Your thoughts, words, and deeds.

We are meant to speak God, to speak the Word, with the fullness of our lives Our lives are meant to declare the nearness of the Kingdom of God.

And although it is true that not every Christian is called to be a wonder worker The dearth of miracles in our age is, I think, of twofold cause:

1) we are not bold in preaching, in living, in bearing witness to the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Our attention is scattered, divided, we've become convinced that our religion is a private affair And is not meant to have public consequence

We're convinced that spiritual realities should be susceptible to material proofs

And we become ashamed when the numinous cannot be definitively confirmed by physical science We become accustomed to attenuating wonder

And reduce our spiritual lives to emotivism or aestheticism

We're religious when the mood strikes us or when beauty momentarily convinces us

And more often than not, let's be honest, our witness is not to the nearness of the Kingdom But to what some have called a moral therapeutic Deism:

God probably exists but is not generally involved and wants me to be happy, faith is good for making me feel better when I need it,
and I'm called to be nice.

Matthew's insight into the priority of preaching is, in part, this:

What we preach, how we live our witness to what we believe matters It changes the world by making a world legible.

In other words: if our world appears filled with less wonder, is bitter, is hard, lackluster It is because we live in a way that rejects wonder, is bitter, is hard, and lackluster.

2) The second cause of the seeming dearth of miracles in our age: Because we are reluctant to preach the nearness of the Kingdom of Love The truly miraculous that already is remains illegible to us...and we miss it.

And what is the truly miraculous?

It's there at the beginning of our reading. "When Jesus saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them,

because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." Compassion. The compassion of God is the font of the miraculous.

As Paul says in our reading from Romans

God doesn't love us because we've managed to be nice people we believe we ought to be

God doesn't love us because we've done the good or thought good thoughts God doesn't love us because we're happy

God doesn't love us because we've preached the nearness of the Kingdom sufficiently today or any day

God loves us because that's who God is

God loves us before we could ever love God God doesn't wait for us to be perfect to love us

God loves us, and in that love draws us into the perfection of his life It is this love that made the stars

This love that stretched the heavens

This love that formed your heart and gave you breath

This love that knew you before the foundation of the world This love that opens his heart for you on the cross

This love that descends to hell to rescue you

This love that crowns you with the Fire of his own Spirit This love that could not imagine the world without you

And that would move heaven and earth to share your life with you In order to share his life with you

This love is the very life of God.

The compassion of God is the wellspring of wonder. Is the wellspring of you.

And our Lord is filled with compassion at the end of Matthew 9

Because: we've been trying to do it on our own, to love, to be good on our own But we're fainting and scattered

Because we don't have the True Shepherd, but so many illegitimate ones:

Our newsfeed, the algorithm, our passions,

sin and death and wicked powers, the violence that thwarts human flourishing And we're exhausted, queasy, sin-sick, and we need healing.

We need to know the nearness of the Kingdom. We need to know we're loved.

And Jesus will show us. The one who is Love will show us the wonderful riches of his love As he opens the treasures of his grace: his very Heart, to us, by his life, and death, and resurrection.

This love, because it is wonder, makes legible the wondrous And invites us to make legible the wondrous To make his life legible in the life of the world.

No, it is not the case that every Christian is called to be a wonder-worker But living the life of Christ How would we be able to miss the healing of the sick in acts of loving forgiveness,

in works of grace that uplift, nurture, human wholeness in our communities, in our neighbors? How would we be able to miss the cleansing of the leper in the restoration of the outcast The welcoming of the stranger, the oppressed, the broken-hearted

How would we be able to miss the raising of the dead in acts of repentance, in newness of life, In the end of despair and in the dawn of a holy hope in a human heart.

How would we be able to miss the casting out of devils in our participation in the liberating grace of God
Freeing us from patterns, structures, institutions of violence, death, degradation
that run us ragged and destroy us.

How would we be able to miss that in preaching the nearness of the Kingdom, In living the nearness of
the Kingdom

In living the love of Christ by grace through faith

we ourselves have become the miracle the world needs As the Kingdom becomes more legible in it and to
it.

You and I both know that this world is indeed filled with nightmares, terror, monstrosity It's hard to miss.
And we are so often in danger, whether consciously or unconsciously
Through action or inaction, of bearing witness to the wrong things, to the nightmares we fear But the
Kingdom of God is near.
The Kingdom of Love is near.

It asks of you two things and it will give you grace to do all that it asks:

Receive that Love.

It is closer to you than the blood in your veins, the breath in your lungs, the thoughts in your head.
Live that Love.

Where do miracles come from?

The compassion of God, the Love of God

Alive in a beloved human life bright, burning, glorious, and glistening with the nearness of God.
You are beloved.

You are a miracle of love.

You have the word of comfort and healing that your neighbor needs to hear Your life is the sign of hope
your neighbor needs to revive.
You are the miracle. Live the Love of God

Preach the nearness of that Love.

And watch the world unfold in the splendid wonder of that miraculous love.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.
