

“SIGNS AND WONDERS.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Acts 5:12-16

Prayer: Holy Father, as we come to consider holy things this morning don't let us remain unmoved, uninterested, unimpressed, unresponsive. Speak to us each according to our greatest needs and feed us with spiritual food and drink for our thirsty souls that are dry and weary in this land and in these days. For the sake of Jesus and His glory, Amen.

Introduction.

How many of you remember the Miracle on Ice in 1980 when the US men's Olympic hockey team beat the four-time gold medalist Russians at the Lake Placid Winter games?

In the final seconds of the game Al Michaels for ABC declared: “Do you believe in miracles?!”

How about the Miracle on the Hudson when Captain Sullenberger landed US Airways flight 1549 on the Hudson River in January 2009.

Maybe you have watched the 1947 movie classic about a Macy's Santa Claus, Miracle of 34th Street.

We use the word miracle pretty loosely and broadly. Finding a parking place close to the door at Costco is no small miracle. How often do we call the birth of a baby a miracle, or being spared from a tragic accident?

As we come to our text for this morning we come to miracles of a very different kind than we encountered last week in the sudden deaths of Ananias and Sapphira. These sign and wonders are more in keeping with the kind Jesus did in the Gospels

God answered their prayers.

Our text is a direct link to Acts 4:29.

Acts 4:29-30 And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, 30 while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.

God answered their prayer in a mighty way, many signs and wonders were done on a daily basis by the apostles in Jesus' name.

These signs and wonders got the attention of everyone, believers and unbelievers alike. There are three results or responses to miracles, the first two are seen in our text, the third will come next week when the leaders arrest the apostles in a jealous rage.

There are first two opposite responses to the signs and wonders.

First, some people dared not join the rest as they gathered at the Temple. Who they were is hard to figure. There are two main possibilities.

Either they are some who have been worshipping and following along but after seeing what happened to Ananias and Sapphira, they were afraid to get too close fearing the same end. They know their own hearts to be hypocritical or lukewarm or a half-hearted allegiance. This would know doubt scare off the faint of heart.

Or they were ***unbelievers*** who were impressed by what they saw and didn't dare speak against what was happening. To their credit they honored the church and showed due respect, high esteem. But to their shame, they avoided God, they avoided their own conscience, they remain hard-hearted in the light of so great a God.

The well-known American journalist Charles Krauthammer once said he didn't believe in God, but he feared Him.

The punishment of Ananias and Sapphira spread a holy kind of fear, but an unfruitful fear, they didn't turn it to good purpose. They see something holy, yet they remain with what is unholy.

Where do you run and hide from a fearful God? There is only one place you can hid, in God Himself. He is the only safe place on earth. God is a consuming fire and the only safe place from that fire is in the fire.

Second, many did become ***believers***, more than ever were added to the Lord.

This is an interesting way to say more people were coming to faith, but Luke's purpose is make clear what was happening. They weren't just being added to the church, like membership in some club, they were being added to the Lord, meaning into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior through repentance and faith.

These have always been the two responses. Wherever there is the manifestation of the power and presence of God in preaching or teaching, in witness or evangelism, in godly and holy living or sacrificial service in the name of Jesus, some will be drawn in and some will resist or deny. God's truth is appealing to some and alarming to others. What do we do with Jesus?

Hearing the Gospel should cause a crisis, a crisis of examining our heart and life and coming face to face with the call of Jesus to leave our former life and to turn and follow Him, a call to separate from all that is unholy and move toward what is holy.

What about signs and wonders today?

In order to answer that we first have to understand what the purpose of miracles are. Let's start with a *definition of miracles*.

A miracle is an event that would not have happened if God had not supernaturally intervened, and that shows God's sovereign power over creation.

When all 23 members of my extended family showed up on time to the Catalina ferry for Reed's wedding technically that was not a miracle, just an answer to prayer. Miracles involve supernatural intervention.

That's the definition, now let's consider the *purpose of miracles* in Scripture. They are called signs because they point to something, they are secondary to the thing they point to.

If we notice when nearly all the miracles in the Bible happened we will get a clue as to their purpose and place in history and in God's redemptive plan.

Almost all of the miracles in the Bible happened in just three key times in history.

God did miracles through Moses during the time of the exodus to prove his authority was from God and he was God's messenger.

God did miracles through the first two prophets, Elijah and Elisha, to prove their authority to speak the words of God and that the prophets were God's messengers. The Law and the Prophets were authenticated, stamped, sealed by miracles.

The miracles in the NT authenticate the divine authority and messenger of Jesus and the apostles.

Miracles are God's way of saying, "This is my chosen messenger in whom I am well pleased, listen to him." Now that he has your attention through this miracle, listen to him.

Signs and wonders are God testifying to the value and truth and necessity and centrality of the Word. They don't save. The thing they point to saves, the Gospel which is the power of God for salvation to all who believe.

The miracles also show God is at work among us, His kingdom is being established on earth, and a restoration of the natural order has begun. The miracles are a sign a time is coming when all will be healed, and Satan will be completely cast out and everyone will be raised from the dead.

So now back to the question, what about signs and wonders today?

“It is perfectly clear that in New Testament times, the gospel was authenticated by signs, wonders and miracles of various characters and descriptions . . . Was it only meant to be true of the early church? . . . The Scriptures never anywhere say that these things were only temporary—never! There is no such statement anywhere” (Lloyd-Jones, *The Sovereign Spirit*, pp. 31–32).

The fact that there are seasons of miracles, and great variations in frequency is evidence that they are of divine origin. If they were of human origin we would be manufacturing them all the time. Their infrequency is proof that they are being done by a sovereign God who is in control of when and where and how.

There are a lot of miracles in our world since the time of the apostles. We just don't hear about them or know about them. Missionaries all over the world have stories to tell of God's miraculous interventions and deliverances and salvation.

Should we pray for signs and wonders and miracles of healing and the power of God's presence? We are invited to seek God for every possible grace in time of need. God's throne is a throne of power and grace. He delights to hear and answer so that His answer will bring Him glory in response to our need.

Come boldly to ask, seek and knock, even persistently like the widow on the judges door. Come boldly and ask confident that He is sovereign and good and He will perfectly answer according to what is best for our greatest good.

We have the example of the early church in prayer. We should pray for miracles if we desire the end for which God does them.

To bring glory to God. To confirm the truthfulness of the Gospel message.

To remove hindrances to God's work and ministry.

To bring help to those in need and increase those added to the Lord.

The greatest sign and wonder of all.

While signs and wonders sounds wonderful and certainly would be exciting to see, experience and history should tell us that signs and wonders are not a cure all. They have brought in all kinds of sin and division, power grabbing, false doctrine and abuses.

The highest and best thing we can desire from the Holy Spirit is love. If we have the signs and wonders without love that will be no good to us at all. I need only remind you of one of the most loved chapters in the Bible, I Corinthians 13.

I Corinthians 13:1-8, 13 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

If I preach but have not love I do no good.

If I serve on council, but have not love ...

If I volunteer and serve, but have not love ...

If I discipline my children, but have not love ...

If I read my Bible and say my prayers, but have not love ...

If I give to the church faithfully and generously, but have not love ...

If I rebuke or correct a brother or sister in the Lord, but have not love ...

All of these things are important and not to be thrown out. That's not the point, the point is that we are to be given over to love, first and foremost. The greatest of these is love.

Over and above everything else we might seek and desire, we must put on love, because without love we miss the whole point of being a Christian. They will know we are Christian by our love.

If we had signs and wonders without love there would be all kinds of issues and arguments and complaints. Who is doing them, how are they doing them, by what authority are they doing them, should they be doing them on Sunday, how disruptive are they being, why are some healed and not others, and do you see the problems they are creating with parking and seating and undesirables coming to church.

Without love everything we do here is ultimately for not. We need love to cover our multitude of sins. And is not every act of genuine, God-glorifying love an uncommon miracle in our day? Is not love for one another the sign and wonder we most need? Let us put on love.

Implications and application.

The most important thing is not can they happen today and if so why don't they. The most important thing is having heard that these things happened and having heard that the purpose was to get our attention and confirm that the message is true, are we among those who believe and count ourselves added to the Lord and are together in unity as we worship and love and serve?

How do we respond to God's Word, how do we respond to the evidence of God in someone's life or in some situation or circumstance? God is at work all around us and in us all the time, are we paying attention, are we noticing, are we interested or are we too busy, too preoccupied, too self-absorbed? Are we whatever, meh or blah, blah, blah?

Are we spiritual awake, alive, tuned in? Do we want more? Do we pray for the eyes of our hearts to be opened?

Ephesians 1:17-19 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might.

Let us keep our feet firmly planted in the truth of the Word of God and believe every word of it and put our faith in it alone. Scripture alone is sufficient for our life and faith. But let us also be open to whatever the Spirit might want to do in and through us. So let us pray for all His power and blessings to blow through your hearts and homes and church.

A Christian with no power has nothing to commend himself to others? A church with no power has nothing to commend itself and invite others to be a part of it. We need the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in our homes and in our fellowship.

Can we see the Spirit at work in changed lives, changed attitudes, forgiveness, love, grace, the fruit of the Spirit, and the gifts of the Spirit being exercised.

Pray for revival, pray for a fresh wind of the Spirit, pray for signs and wonders that will awaken sleeping souls to look to Christ and His Word, who will fear God and hate sin and seek forgiveness and have a new desire to worship God. Pray this for your children and grandchildren.

Pray for bold preaching and for bold believing and for bold living, pray for signs and wonders that will point to Jesus and the power and truth of His Word.

We have a God who can create the world in 6 days, He can part the sea, He can stop the sun and storms, multiply bread and turn water into wine, He can cast out demons and raise the dead.

Come prayerful expectant that God is in this place, anything can happen here.