

It's as much about Doubt as about Miracles

On the first Sunday of Lent the devil urged Jesus to do something miraculous to win the attention of the world. Jesus refused! Since then the Lenten Gospel readings have displayed Jesus as transfigured on a mountain, unveiling a Samaritan woman's past, healing a man born blind, and today calling a dead man forth out of his tomb. Pretty spectacular: one miraculous account after another! Yet in our own initial reaction to these wonders we overlook something: the doubt shown by all the observers.

Theme One: *Miracles are Impossible*

In the case of the transfiguration narrative maybe it's not so much doubt but a kind of recoil that hits the disciples. They are stunned by the change in Jesus. In the case of the Samaritan woman at the well, she wonders where this Jesus can find what he calls "living water" when only a stagnant cistern is accessible – and because he is an alien, a Jewish traveler, she's wary of why he's talking to her; then startled he knows her past history. That's not all. His disciples also wonder why he's talking to a woman. His offer to provide them with "living water" out of their very inner being gets lost amid ethnic and gender preoccupations. In the case of the man born blind, the cure gets lost in questions like: is this sighted fellow actually the one who was blind this morning; how was it done. The Pharisees have their own doubts: again, how did he do it; why did he break the Sabbath law forbidding such acts; let's check with his parents; there's something wrong here; let's ask him again; who did it?

In the case of the Lazarus event the disciples can't see going back to Bethany to visit a sick Lazarus; if he is sleeping, that's good; also it's dangerous for Jesus to go back; Martha and Mary greet Jesus with regret that he has arrived too late; their brother is dead and entombed; even the onlookers at the tomb are skeptical anything can be done – Lazarus being dead four days. In other words, throughout these Lenten Gospel readings, amid the achievement of the most unlikely of possibilities, observers can't overcome their fixation that things cannot so spectacularly and surprisingly change.

Theme Two: *Everything is Possible*

I mean even on the everyday level, if we were to call forth the characters in the Lenten Gospels to step into our current century – just on the secular level, today's actualities (like flight or even a refrigerator) would blow their minds! I mean: this is true of simply the technological "miracles" we take for granted everyday. And what about those other miracles that are happening every day – often unheralded: radical changes in mind and behavior among people which only metaphor can describe? As, for instance, your own transfiguration from what you thought you were; your transition from a stagnant way of life to one of fluidity, sparkling; your ability to see in ways you never saw before, a wellspring of insights; your exiting the tomb in which you have been all tied up in knots until something happened that let you exit into the light of day – to fullness of life?

If you have been not just hearing but listening to these Lenten Gospels, what was happening to the transfigured Jesus and the Samaritan woman and the man born blind and climactically to Lazarus should have been happening to you! The episodes reflect your own miraculous potential.

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