

Miracles Hidden in Plain View
Trinity Sunday 18 May 2008
Holy Trinity Church Headington Quarry
Canon Beaumont Stevenson

It's lovely to be here for your parish name day - Trinity Sunday. Of all the feast days on the church calendar, this one was actually first devised by an English saint-Thomas Beckett. So it is a local commemoration in two senses of the word.

What is Trinity Sunday about anyway-the three in one?
Essentially I believe that it is about finding the miracles of God's presence in ordinary life. So the theme I would like to focus briefly on today is on discovering miracles hidden in plain view.

As someone once said, God does seem to enjoy playing hide and seek with himself-so perhaps God can be truly called playful in the fullest sense of the term.

When I was younger, and consequently much more sophisticated than I am now, I used not to believe in Miracles.

That all changed though, I now see them all over the place.

What brought about this change?
A powerful religious experience?
Not really.

It came when I was watching Candid Camera one day.
There was a man in a business suit, who was waiting next to a bus stop.
Next to the bus stop was a traditional red post box.
As he was waiting there, reading his per, the post box said "hello."
The man glanced around-no one else there, and continued to read.
"Well, you're not very friendly," said the post box. You could at least say 'Good morning'.
"Good morning," the man said through clenched teeth.
With a little bit of persuasion, the post box got the man into conversation and he was soon talking about his children, their schooling and the general state of the world.
Of course, just as he was in full flow, someone from the programme came by and asked, "who are you talking to?"
The man explained that he was talking to the post box. Of course at this point the post box remained perfectly silent, as post boxes ordinarily do.
As the poor man was about to slink away in embarrassment, all was revealed.

However, watching it did make an impression on me.

I thought this man was actually experiencing a miracle, because post boxes do not generally speak. Yet, how soon did he drop his amazement and treat this miraculous event as something really quite ordinary and carry on with his conversation.
I then wondered how many miracles I might have witnessed and how just as

quickly I filed away what I was seeing as 'coincidence' or 'there must be a rational explanation for this somewhere, but I am at the moment just too busy to think about it.

When I began to look carefully and really noted what I was observing, I saw many miracles indeed. I am now a firm believer in miracles, based not on blind belief, but on careful observation.

On the practical side, if something is very important to us, we give it many names, and do not casually file it away under one name. Hence, the three names for God.

Imagine a person of the Inuit community living in Alaska in an igloo. He crawls out early one morning and then crawls back. The spouse asks what it is like outside.

If he says 'snow', while that is technically correct, it is not really all that informative. Is it snow as the white fluffy stuff lying around a varying depths, or is blizzard, ice, hail, fine mist, slush, or approaching iceberg? A more refined definition might make quite a difference in planning the activity of one's day. Hence they have over 22 names for the stuff we lump under the term 'snow'.

Likewise if we offer someone a whisky and ask: "Anything you'd like with that?" and the answer is "Yes, some H₂O please," is it H₂O as ice, water, or boiling steam for a hot toddy because the guest is feeling poorly?

As spiritual people who experience God in many different ways, just to say it's 'God is really not helpful.

The Holy Trinity helps us to see God in important three of his many forms.

I remember a friend of mine in seminary who was always getting into trouble for something or other-he made it into an art form. He looked glum one day after a final theology exam. I asked him how he did.

He replied that the powers that be had invited him in for a viva.

"Why?" I asked.

He replied: "you remember the question on the exam which asked if Jesus is God, who was he talking to in Gethsemane? Write for 20 minutes. Well, I answered in just 4 words THREE PERSONS, ONE GOD. Apparently they said that while it was technically correct, we needed to have a chat so they could see if I could add any more flesh to those simple bones."

St Cyril of Jerusalem wrote many centuries ago: "the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water, welling up to eternal life. Why did the gospel writer call the grace of the Spirit, water? Because all things depend on water. Water comes down from heaven as rain: water always comes down in the same form, yet its effects are manifold-thus it takes one form in the palm tree, and another in the vine. It is in all things and takes all forms, though it is uniform, for the rain does not change, but it adapts itself to the nature of the things which receive it and it becomes what is appropriate to each." Similarly with the Holy Spirit. He is one and of one nature, but he apportions his grace as he wills to each one." (Divine Office II, p.662)

So God comes to earth again in His spirit in whatever form our personality takes, like sun shining through a stained glass window, revealing our individual colours.

God comes to earth again and is revealed through a caring touch we might give another, through our sense of humour.

Our practical care

Or through the baby we hold in our arms, seeing afresh the miracle of new birth-the divine miracle revealed in tiny form.

It is sometimes surprising in what forms God reveals himself and in what diverse forms sacraments come.

Formerly, I was chaplain of a Psychiatric establishment and in that dynamic setting I saw several minor and a few major miracles disguised in the ordinary.

One Sunday, I was going down the rail administering Holy Communion. As I got to one lady, she gave out n earl-splitting screamed, collapsed across the communion rail sobbing, "I am not worthy."

Quick as flash, the lady kneeling next to her reached into her pocket and withdrew something, which she offered to the woman sobbing next to her.

"In that case, have a Polo mint my dear."

We were all a bit non-plussed, and the woman looked thoughtful.

I said, "You can either have the sacrament or the Polo mint, whatever you feel you can handle just now."

There was a long pause while she made up her mind. She thought and we waited. We waited and she thought.

Finally, she said, "I'll stick with the Polo mint." And took one. I continued on down the rail.

Next week she was back.

As I started down the rail, she leaned over past everyone else, stuck her thumb in the air and shouted, "Worthy this week, Father!"

Spontaneously, the congregation clapped and cheered.

At the end of the service, I said that miracles happen all the time, and that sometimes we miss seeing them-particularly the small ones. I just wanted to point out a small one.

I said that when we feel poorly, we can sometimes only eat broth. Because our friend was offered the broth of a Polo mint last week, by a priest of God disguised as a fellow patient kneeling next to her, so she could receive the real sacramental food this week.

That was not only a small miracle, but also it showed how each of us is a priest to others, sometimes without quite realizing it. I invited them to keep watching and to keep handing out the sacramentals in whatever forms it presented itself.

So I would ask you to reflect..
How has God, the Holy Trinity
The Father, The Son, the Holy Spirit
Appeared in one of her many guises to you?

Perhaps being in love?
Being forgiven?
Having friends believe the best in you-just at the point when you acted in
the worst way possible?
In the form of a grandchild uttering a prophetic statement?
More particularly as God's angels often do disguised as an anonymous
stranger, who was there just at the right time, doing just the right thing?

In a moment of silence..
I would like to invite you to go on your own miracle search:

Just recently, how has God appeared in one of her many disguises and come
into your life in some small but significant way?

In what way may you have been acting on behalf of the Almighty?

Can you now give thanks for this small miracle?

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