

# MORE THAN A MIRACLE PART I

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A HOMILY PREACHED ON PALM SUNDAY / PASSION SUNDAY  
MARCH 20, 2005

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[Reference text: The Passion Narrative  
according to Matthew 26:36-27:66]

*So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Mt. 27:59-60*

Today's gospel drama re-enactment is all about death:

In the garden at Gethsemane, it is the imminent *foreboding* of death.

With the arrest, accusations and trial of Jesus, there's the *threat* of death.

With the recalcitrant followers of Jesus who once called him Rabbi and Master and Lord, there's the *fear* of death.

Then, with the fickle crowds — displeased and easily persuaded when their Hosanna King turns out to be nothing more than a peasant on a donkey, who becomes a mockery before the dominant oppressors — there's the taunting *lust* for death.

It would take more than a miracle to get Jesus out of the mess he found himself in by the time the religious, political and military authorities get their hands on him.

And that's the point: Palm Sunday, or Passion Sunday, begins Holy Week and the journey to Easter with the crucifixion, and Jesus is fresh out of miracles.

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***Palm Sunday begins the journey to Easter with the crucifixion, and Jesus is fresh out of miracles.***

The story we are to re-enact in the coming days of the Great Triduum is the yearly remembrance that it will take more than a miracle, or two, to bring us to Easter morning. Yet even at that, we have a problem with miracles;

and the change required of us as a result of them in our lives. How then are we possibly ready to encounter Easter, and something more than miracle?

Last week I told you the story of *St. Jim, and the Bones & Breath of Miracles*. The first miracle we read from the scriptures was Ezekiel's miraculous vision of a valley of dry bones being reconstituted, then infused with the breath of life again; in order to describe in prophetic terms the restoration of Israel aft their wasteland experience in Babylonian exile.

Then the gospel miracle story was about Jesus raising his friend, Lazarus from the dead: dead 4 days and buried in a cave, J commands the dead man to come out, and stumble out he does, rejoining the land of the living and the dying.

In today's passion story of our Lord's arrest, trial, torture and execution, it ends with another very dead man, buried in a cave. Except this time it's Jesus, and no one's around to miraculously bring him back to the land of the living and the dying.

We know the story. We've heard it before. We know there'll be an empty tomb and nothing left but a funeral shroud, and the absence of what once was, but is no more. And we'll be reminded resurrection is something more than miraculous resuscitation, like Lazarus; or even a reconstitution of the old like the people of Israel rising up out of their valley of dry bones.

Whether you believe the miracle Ezekiel describes is to be taken *literally* or — as Ezekiel himself describes it — metaphorically; or whether you believe Lazarus merely had a near-death experience, or that the sod of the earth really coughed him back up again at Jesus's command — that really isn't the point. *Believing* in miracles, or not — whether so-called *natural* miracles or supernatural, inexplicable miracles — isn't our biggest hurdle. *People are afraid of miracles.*

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***Believing in miracles, or not — whether so-called natural miracles or supernatural, inexplicable miracles — isn't our biggest hurdle. People are afraid of miracles.***

This was the seemingly strange suggestion I offered last week, made by the character/narrator, in the book *Peace Like a River*. The character asserts people fear miracles because they fear being changed; and I, for one, think that's often the case.

Miracles introduce a new dimension into one's old reality and require change; it shakes the foundation and dismantles the old you. You're never the same after a miracle; and it can make anything else posing as what's popularly known these days as an "extreme makeover" simply pale by comparison.

Last week I related the story of my near-death experience as a toddler, when I fell off a dock unnoticed, only to be miraculously discovered in time by a family friend. *Miraculously*, I was revived and survived, for the indefinite time being.

And the book's character, Reuben Land begins his story with his own birth – how his lungs initially did not function, how the obstetrician had given up, then how his father picked up the lifeless infant and commanded him to breathe; and the Spirit breath of God filled his lungs.

After worship last week one of our parish member shared a similar story with me. His own Uncle George began life as a "blue baby," as they're called. At birth his lungs had failed to function for so many minutes that the doctor had actually begun filling out the death certificate. When he survived it, his problems weren't over. Amazingly, it took him another *sixty-five years* to get a birth certificate! That's just how much people resist the change required of you as a result of miracles!

Everywhere we turn — if we only look a little — people are in the throws of such a fear of change. In Florida, the case of Terry Shiavo, the woman in a vegetative state for fifteen years, has been embroiled in a battle to change her life. Spouse, family, state courts and legislature, have propelled this one miraculous life and death story into a national debate. Now even elected representatives in the federal congress are attempting to introduce a bill that would forestall such change; change not only for one person or family, but for the way we all view life and death.

And then if you throw *religion* into the mix it really becomes volatile. Take the example a week ago of the escapee/accused killer of an Atlanta court judge, court reporter, sheriff's deputy and federal agent who initially eluded law enforcement authorities when he broke into the home of a young woman named Ashley Smith. Dubbed a hero and credited with the man's voluntary surrender, the public and media describe her savvy, quick-witted demeanor that resulted in her miraculous escape.

As she explained it, she simply read to him from scripture and a popular motivational life-guide book, and spoke to him about the purpose and value of every person's life.

"Look in my eyes," he said, "I'm already dead." But in response she believed and explained it was no random accident that the intruder had picked her apartment. Rather, it was a miracle, and that his life still had purpose; that there was something in her heart he could take for himself and he himself could change; that they were brothers and sisters in Christ.

The former killer then called her his "angel," let her go unharmed, and surrendered himself to his new life that may well include his execution in the state of Florida.

Then – almost simultaneously – there was the other story last week of the mild-mannered computer analyst and member of a religious sect, who went on a deadly shooting spree in the middle of their worship service in a Wisconsin hotel room. I tell you, throw religion into the mix and it life-altering changes can really happen, for better or worse.

I think about it all, and it makes sense: No wonder the scribes and Pharisees, the Sanhedrin, high priest and Pilate, and even the fickle crowds and the frightened disciples were all afraid of this religious rabble rouser, Jesus of Nazareth. He was a miracle worker who did more than amaze and astound with his signs and wonders. He filled them with the fear of miracles, and the change required of us a result of them. So much so that it would take more than a miracle to bring it all to a good end -- an end that we call *Easter*.

More about that next week. For now, simply this: Easter is more than a miracle.

For you know – as surely as you know your name, and your own story by now – we are already *walking miracles*. And if so, then the real question for us this *holy* week: what change is required of us and our miraculous lives, so that we too – in Christ – might be more than a miracle?

Amen. *jb+*