

Signs and Wonders

Psalm 31:1–5, 19–24, Luke 7:18–23

Center Church, Hartford

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When John the Baptist's followers came to Jesus asking if he was really the longed-for Messiah, Jesus did not respond, as too often the church has over the centuries, with historical and theological arguments. He did not lay out his genealogy or speak of his spiritual intelligence.

He asked those followers to look at what he was doing and then tell John what they had seen. He lifted up his work of healing, more specifically his work of healing those who had been outcast or marginalized, like the blind and lepers. He talked about touching those who were dead (again, something that others would not do because it would make them unclean) and bringing them to life. He talked about how he went not to the wealthy and powerful, but to the poor to tell them of God's love for them and desire to work with and for them to raise them up, as Jesus' mother, Mary, had imagined in her song back when she was pregnant with him. She had said the sign of God's activity included lifting up the lowly and filling the hungry with good things and bringing down the powerful.

“How do we know God is present with us in you?” John’s disciples asked. “Well,” said Jesus, “what do you see? What I’m doing is what God is about in this world. If you dismiss it or are offended by whom I touch and speak with, then you cannot see God at all and miss the immense blessing of God’s presence! It may not be quite what you expected.”

When I asked you to let me know how you see God at work in the world in the midst of a pandemic, I wondered what you might say. I know that many of us see signs of God’s work as Harold and Larry did, in the beauty of the world God created, which is really apparent in the spring, is it not? Many of the Psalmists also saw God in the world around us; who but God would have made this complex, beautiful and baffling earth?

But other than Harold and Larry, no one responded to me at all. I wondered if perhaps the question seemed too hard, if you weren’t sure what was God acting and what wasn’t, if all the theological arguments had gotten in the way of our ability to notice where God might be in any place and time. If we have overcomplicated what Jesus saw as pretty straightforward.

It made me sad.

Especially because, in the midst of all the mess out there and the politics and the death counts and the protesters and the mismanagement and all the awfulness of the past two months, I have found great joy in playing what might be considered a faith game of “Where’s Waldo?” I keep asking myself, “Where’s God?” and then, on my best days, I take the trouble to look.

“Are you the one who is to come?” “What do you see and hear?” Attention must be paid in order to discern God in our midst. Remember who Jesus was, what our ancestors experienced in the midst of their pain and struggle, as we heard from the Psalmist today, and what we may have experienced in our own lives that keeps us connected to God. Taking a moment to sit back and ask ourselves the question makes us pay attention not only to the loud and angry and death-dealing around us, but to the other signs and wonders that it’s too easy to miss.

We need to notice them because we need to, like John’s followers, become part of them, part of who God is and where God is at work right now. We need to be, ourselves, the body of Christ in this world today. If we can’t remember how God is in the world, we won’t remember how we are to be in the world. And right now, it is absolutely critical that we remember. Because those who Jesus healed and touched and spoke to, the most vulnerable in his society, are also those in our society who are suffering the most in these days. And we

need to be paying attention to how God is at work with them, drawing *our* attention to them and those working to serve them.

So, let me stop talking for a moment. Think about what I have said, about what Mary and Jesus said were signs of God's presence and power. Where are you seeing God at work? Think about it, and then while Stewart sings write what you are seeing in the chat if you are on Zoom or on the comments if you are on Facebook. What do you see and hear if you pay attention?

(After Stewart sings) Read some of those noted and comment.

Keep looking! Listen to the Psalmist who yearns to experience God in the midst of struggle: "Love the Lord, all you saints. The Lord preserves the faithful but abundantly repays the one who acts haughtily. Be strong, and let your heart take courage. Wait for the Lord.