



God, Jesus and the Tooth Fairy

BY KAREN GUSTAFSON, MINISTER EMERITA, UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION OF DULUTH, MINNESOTA

My first conversation with my granddaughter Phoenix regarding the tooth fairy happened in a larger conversation about religion in general. She was five-and-a-half and had already lost three baby teeth, the first during a vacation to Trinidad with her mother.

In the months just prior to this conversation, I had been passively curious about her parents' decision that she could attend a Lutheran Bible School throughout most of the year with her maternal grandmother, a conservative Christian. This seemed to me to be at odds with the religious sentiments of her parents, who were, I perceived, at least agnostic and at most Unitarian Universalist.

Phoenix and I were out for lunch and she was chatting matter-of-factly about the large refrigerator box that her father had rescued and made into a playhouse. "It is," she said, "a perfect place to play Jesus, Mary and Joseph."

I took a big breath.

"Are you still going to Bible school with Grandma Mamma?" I asked.

"Oh, yes," she said, "but this fall I will go to real school. I will like that better because at Bible School we only learn about God and Jesus, God and Jesus. And besides, Grandma Mamma doesn't believe in the tooth fairy."

"Really?" I said, trying to sound more incredulous than relieved.

"Yup," she said. "But I know there's a tooth fairy. When I lost my first tooth in Trinidad I put it under my pillow and I got a note from the tooth fairy saying that she did not have my gift because of the crowds at Carnival but she would be back in three days. And in three days, there was a ring and five dollars in Trinidad money under my pillow."

More, I thought, than she might expect from God or Jesus.

Her parents, with elegant ease, allowed her to sort out this little trinity of mythical figures (God, Jesus and the Tooth Fairy), which I found to be an interesting beginning for her own free and responsible search for truth and meaning that figures so prominently as the fourth principle of *this* Grandma's faith tradition.

A few years later, I commented on her little ring she always wore. She explained (a little impatiently, I thought) "I *told* you, Grandma, that this came from the tooth fairy when she came to me in Trinidad!"

I have mulled these interactions over and over.

Had I shamelessly cooperated in a lie? I mean, I don't really believe in the tooth fairy. But why, I wondered, was I so willing to engage this child in extending an illusion that will ultimately be disproven or denied? I suppose I believed that when the literal reality of the tooth fairy's existence came to Phoenix, that belief would have served its purpose and its literal truth would simply be irrelevant.

And yet I cannot help but wonder how I would respond if the pull of the Bible stories and Grandma Mamma's denial had been stronger than the pull of the tooth fairy. Would I have been able to let *those* miracles stand without question? "Raised from the dead, you say. Wow, that's amazing."

But what's the difference, really?

Some reconciliation of this distinction came to me in a quotation from scientist and writer Gary Bauslaugh: "Rational people temporarily suspend critical judgment in order to imagine that fictional stories are real. Creationists permanently suspend

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A miracle is when
the whole is greater
than the sum
of its parts.
—Frederick
Buechner

A monthly for religious liberals

THINKING ABOUT MIRACLES

- GOD, JESUS AND THE TOOTH FAIRY
Karen Gustafson
- THE MIRACLE OF LIFE
Edward
- A UU VIEW OF MIRACLES
Scott McLennan
- ORDINARY MIRACLES
Laurie Bushbaum
- FROM YOUR MINISTER
Meg Riley
- RESOURCES FOR LIVING
Lynn Ungar
- SMALL MIRACLES
Jason

critical judgment in order to believe their fictional stories did happen.”

In this sense, it is not the particularity of the story that is of note, but more the lens through which we view it. For thousands of years now, many have viewed the miracles in the Bible as proof texts pointing, as Episcopal Bishop Spong says, to the supernatural power of God, which is the “foundation of our security system.” In rejecting that version of God, Spong—and many of us—summarily reject the idea of miracles at all. If the mere use of the word immediately conjures up Spong’s



Notice of Annual Meeting

To all members of the Church of the Larger Fellowship, Unitarian Universalist

Per Article VII, Sections 1 and 2, of the Church of the Larger Fellowship (CLF) Bylaws, the 45th Annual Meeting will be held via video/telephone conference call and screen sharing on June 11, 2018 at 8:00PM ET.

We will post all the necessary documents and contact information to the CLF website (www.clfuu.org/annualmeeting) by June 4, 2018. You can download materials and print them, or call the CLF office at 617-948-6150 and request a paper copy.

The purpose of the meeting is, from the slate of candidates recommended by the nominating committee, to

- Elect three members to 3-year terms on the board of directors,
- Elect one member to a 3-year term on the nominating committee,
- Elect a clerk and treasurer

We will elect a moderator from among members present to preside at the meeting.

Rebecca Scott, Clerk

definition of miracles as the “supernatural setting aside of natural causes,” then we might well have grounds for skepticism or outright rejection of the notion of miracle.

But I confess that this definition leaves me feeling more than a little resentful. Where do the literalists on either side of the Christian miracle debate get off forcing a clear line between what is real and what is not? What of those deeply human experiences that somehow defy reason and logic and proof?

Anyone who reads fiction, or goes to the theater or the cinema, understands that we don’t need to know the whole story behind every character, or every minute detail of the setting. We can still be in relationship with those characters or embrace the unfolding drama of their lives within a context that is clearly not real in the literal sense, but is a reflection of some greater reality.

What’s important is the willingness to temporarily set aside the literal, the rational; to disarm judgment for the purpose of opening up some other part of our being.

I have watched a thousand sunsets, each one of them different. I am certain that there is a scientific explanation for every nuance of light and color, but I don’t think that knowing all of that would enhance my experience. I hear birdsongs from birds whose names someone knows, and I choose to remain unschooled in ornithology. I know that if I take apart a butterfly to try to understand it I will end up with a pile of butterfly parts.

Please understand that I am in no way questioning the value of taxonomy and physics and the explainable wonders of the known universe. But sometimes I want to simply watch from the darkened theater, engaged and amazed by a world I cannot explain.

It is not my desire to turn us away from reason but rather to encourage us toward wonder, toward the miracles we find beneath our pillow should we be willing to look. ■

The Miracle of Life

BY EDWARD, CLF MEMBER
INCARCERATED IN OHIO

Dear CLF Family,

The miracle that I would like to share is the miracle of life, and what it means to me to be truly alive.

A while back I had a near-death experience. I found myself waking up on the bathroom floor in prison at 6:30 in the morning. The surgeon called my condition a “widow maker,” more commonly known as a double pulmonary embolism, and told me that only 6% of patients survive this.

But my miracle doesn’t stop there. A few months after the event I was talking to my best friend about how my life had been one gigantic lie. He suggested that I should try living and telling the truth. Simple, huh? Not so much for me. The ramifications of truth-telling could be—and were—devastating.

I told two truths to family and friends. The first was that I lied about not doing the thing that put me in prison. The second was that I am gay. Well, as you might guess, all but eight people left me. Eight! My pastor stopped visiting and giving me money because he couldn’t support me being gay. In fact, being gay was the main reason why everyone else has stayed away.

Where is the miracle in all of that? Happiness, contentment, and so much more. Freedom to be me! Because of this freedom, I have found Wicca, which feels true to my beliefs in a way that what I got from my pastor never was. Not living in lies is awesome. Living is so much easier now.

This is my miracle. Something bad turned out for my good. ■



A UU View of Miracles

BY REV. SCOTTY McLENNAN,
LECTURER IN POLITICAL ECONOMY,
STANFORD GRADUATE
SCHOOL OF BUSINESS



I have several dozen books about Unitarian Universalism in my home office. I looked through them all, and only three have any kind of entry in their index or table of contents for “miracles.” In one the index reference is to “miracles, impossibility of,” and the associated text takes a scientific perspective. A second book, on the history of Unitarian Universalism, relates the question of miracles to three nineteenth century ministers: Andrews Norton, William Henry Furness, and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

The third reference is in a chapter entitled “How Miraculous Are Miracles?” from a 1987 Beacon Press book by Unitarian Universalist minister Peter Fleck. He ends up saying that miracles don’t exist in the sense of a violation of the law of nature by God.

Not a terribly auspicious start for a sermon on a Unitarian Universalist view of miracles. I could simply stop now and assert: *There are no miracles for Unitarian Universalists. Period.*

But actually I don’t think that’s true. Moreover, our tradition has had a dramatic impact on all of Protestant Christianity’s understanding of miracles in the modern era. That historical impact continues today, and I think it’s worth exploring. So I’ll forge on.

There are two classic Christian positions on miracles that have inspired debate up to the present time. Thomas Aquinas of the thirteenth century understood a miracle to be something that occurred completely beyond the order of nature. Miracles are literally supernatural in the sense that they are events that happen, as he put it, “outside the ordinary processes of the whole of created nature.”

Nine centuries before Aquinas, Augustine took a different stance. For him there was only one miracle: creation itself. All of nature and all natural processes are miraculous because they reflect the creative nature of God. Miracles aren’t contrary to the laws of nature; they’re simply outside of what human beings know of nature. They are activities that produce an effect of wonder or awe on the human beholder.

We moderns then might say, *Wonder and awe until they are explained scientifically, so that we can then see exactly how they align with the laws of nature.* Or we might say, *Wonder and awe are actually enhanced for me through scientific explanation: How wonderful—how awesome—is this creation, this natural order in which I find myself! Hallelujah!*

Protestant reformers took a different tack, starting in the sixteenth century. They agreed that miracles—in the sense of particular divine interventions in the natural world—had occurred in biblical times, but then they claimed that miracles had ceased to occur anywhere in the world or anytime thereafter. As Martin Luther wrote, all claims of miracles happening in his time were a “tom foolery” of the devil, devised for “chasing people hither and yon.”

Protestants stressed the importance of the Bible in Christian life. Most reformers agreed with John Calvin that believers’ confidence should rest on God’s promises in the sacred text alone and not on any kinds of signs and wonders that they might claim to have experienced personally or that were testified to by their contemporaries. This became known as the cessationist view of miracles: miracles had ceased at the end of the biblical era.

For over three hundred years, from the sixteenth century well into the nineteenth, Protestants were in near consensus on the view that miracles had ceased to occur. The Enlightenment and the scientific revolution bolstered

this outlook. David Hume, in a 1748 book, provided a philosophically fatal blow to any claim that miracles can be founded on evidence. Meanwhile, scientists denied that miracles could co-exist with the natural laws of the universe. They began to offer scientific explanations for many miracles described in the Bible. And theologians developed understandings of religion that made the idea of miracles religiously irrelevant.

Our tradition has had a dramatic impact on all of Protestant Christianity’s understanding of miracles in the modern era.

Then in the nineteenth century along came English Romantic poets and American Transcendentalists (whom Unitarian Universalists hold in high esteem). William Wordsworth wrote that he had personally “felt a presence that disturbs me with the joy of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused.” Coleridge described a “beauty-making power” that had personally freed him from “dejection,” from “Reality’s dark dream.”

American Unitarian minister Theodore Parker was particularly hard on the Protestant understanding of miracles as having ceased with biblical times. He explained how that was twice wrong: first, that human beings had been “senseless clods until instructed by miracles” in the biblical age; and second, that God had now been removed from active engagement in the world, leaving us only to read our Bibles. That would mean that the current generation is “to have no sense of the presence of God in the world,” relying only on “past relics of the divine presence.”

Since this Protestant understanding of miracles had made God absent from the

world, it was not surprising to Parker that there was a crisis of faith among modern believers.

Parker's contemporary Unitarian minister Ralph Waldo Emerson was even harder on both the cessationist view of miracles, and on philosophical and scientific critiques of miracles as not being founded in evidence. Emerson found the power of religion to come not from sterile analysis of a biblical text but from personal intuition. In his famous 1838 "Divinity School Address"

My personal preference regarding miracles is to see them as poetry....

at Harvard he explained that Jesus "spoke of miracles; for he felt man's life was a miracle, and all that man doth... But the word Miracle, as pronounced by the Christian churches, gives a false impression; it is Monster."

That was for two reasons. First, because the church assumed an absence of God from the world after the biblical era. Second, because those who saw God as still intervening from time to time in the natural order radically misunderstood how God is present. God, declared Emerson, is not a watchmaker who then periodically tinkers with the creation he long ago



established. Instead, God is one with all that exists—miracles are "one with the blowing clover and the flowing rain." The great miracle is the energizing force of the universe itself.

The Protestant world never recovered from the Romantic-Transcendentalist challenge. The cessationist view of miracles collapsed, and by the twentieth century sharp conflicts had arisen over questions of miracles. On the one hand, there were those in the church who rejected miracles entirely, includ-

ing the claim that there had been miracles during the time of the Bible. They spoke of Christian identity as being tied to the character and moral teachings of Jesus, not to his allegedly miraculous acts.

On the other hand, faith healing took off, as many Christians now claimed not only to have experienced miraculous cures and divine interventions in their own lives, but also to be able to produce medical miracles themselves by divine forces working through them. A *Time* magazine poll has found that just under 70% of all Americans today believe in miracles actively occurring in the world. The modern age has dramatic crosscurrents of the Jesus Seminar whittling away at the gospel miracles, while at the same time respected medical journals publish studies on the effect of prayer on healing.

My personal preference regarding miracles is to see them as poetry, not in the realm of history and science and logic. I prefer the Augustinian view of seeing the miraculous in the regular processes of nature itself, rather than the Thomistic view of miracles happening outside of or contrary to the order of nature. I resonate to Ralph Waldo Emerson's notion that "the Highest dwells within us," although we're not usually in touch with that reality. "There is a deep power in which we exist and whose beatitude is accessible to us... It comes to the lowly and simple; it comes to whosoever will put off what is...proud; it comes as insight; it comes as security and grandeur."

Emerson does not assume that all of us will know this life force all of the time, or even some of the time. Yet, it can arrive through spiritual disciplines like meditation and prayer and through moral disciplines of character building. Then, when it comes, it seems miraculous. "When it breaks through our intellect, it is genius; when it breathes through our will, it is virtue; when it flows through our affections, it is love." ■

Ordinary Miracles

BY REV. LAURIE BUSHBAUM, MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA



I love a magic show, because the magician appears to do the impossible. But I also know that they deal in illusion and use specially-designed props. Still, I always leave shaking my head just a little, not wanting to miss anything! A magic show pulls me out of my ho-hum daily attitude, jostles me into keener awareness. And perhaps that is what Albert Einstein meant when he said, "There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is."

The older I get, the more inclined I am to see everything as magic, as miraculous. I know that when I go through my days fully alive and awake to what's around me, I live a happier, richer existence. I savor my cappuccino, marvel at fresh carrots, enjoy the heck out of a conversation, poem or good book. And what about the human invention of music? It is magical and miraculous. If I practiced diligently for a very long time, I might learn to pull a rabbit out of a hat, but I'd so much rather practice being delighted daily by the ordinary miracles around me.

In general, I think it is easier for UUs to talk about magic than about miracles. It's easier to keep the magic of fairy tales in perspective, than, say, the miracle stories in Judeo-Christian sacred texts. We don't feel our belief system challenged by three wishes from a frog in a fairy tale in the same way we may feel threatened by the story of Jesus raising the dead. We know that in fairy tales magic is symbolic. But when it comes to religion, we squirm at the magical and miraculous.

I suspect this is true because religious conservatives take miracle stories as literal truth, rather than symbolic truth.

Many of us, in order to distance ourselves from this lack of rationality in religion, remove ourselves entirely from the miraculous in religious stories. Thomas Jefferson was a perfect example. He created his own version of the Bible, which became known as "The Jefferson Bible." To do this, Jefferson simply removed all the miracle stories.

I understand his desire to affirm the use of reason in religion. But I see this tactic as a particular stage of faith development, not a final answer. It's true: at some point in our lives we need to understand the difference between a rabbit with a pocket watch sliding down a backyard hole to a Wonderland kingdom and the skittish real rabbit in the back yard.

The older I get, the more inclined I am to see everything as magic, as miraculous.

But here's where the rubber hits the road: after we know the difference between the fantastical and the real, we might then discover that the lines between the two are more fluid than what we so carefully delineated.

We UUs can get so hung up on using our rational minds that we forget to look for truth in story and metaphor. So let me tell you a couple stories. First is a Biblical miracle story, which we could easily dismiss as preposterous on a rational level. But I hope you will hang in there with me while we dig a little deeper.

In the Christian Gospels Jesus is tired and travels by boat to a quiet place for some rest. However, he is followed by crowds eager to hear his teachings.

The story continues:

When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick. As evening approached, the disciples came to

him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food."

Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."

"We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered.

"Bring them here to me." And he directed the people to sit down on the grass.

Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, Jesus gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve baskets full of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand.

Now, I want you to hold that in one hand while I tell you another story. In 1974 self-made millionaire Millard Fuller and his wife Linda had a change of heart. They had incredible material wealth but were unhappy. Their marriage was in trouble. After much soul-searching, they decided to take very seriously the Bible's call to them as Christians to share their wealth and help the poor. They literally sold all their possessions and gave the money to the poor and sought a new focus for their lives.

They ended up at Koinonia Farm, in Americus, Georgia, a small Christian community in which people were struggling to understand what it meant to live the teachings of Jesus today. From Koinonia Farm, the Fullers started Habitat for Humanity. With the staggering vision of decent housing for every person on earth, they set out to do impossible magic. What began as a handful of people in Georgia has been transformed into teams of thousands of volunteers in 100 countries building

and renovating homes for 6.8 million people.

And what is even more magical about this is that Habitat doesn't just build houses. It builds community and hope and skills. That's why it works. Imagine raising three children in a tar-paper shack, say, or a broken bus. Then imagine being told that a lot of people who don't even know you are going to help you build a house. And in the process, you are befriended and blessed by all the other workers. In the months of work you learn new skills and discover that you have more strength than you imagined. In the end you not only have a house, and hope, you have had the experience of being part of a supportive team.

In a tiny way I feel a part of this magic because every month I send off my pledge money to Habitat.



It's only enough to buy a sheet of plywood or a few bags of nails. But lots of others do the same. And that's how the multitude builds many houses.

On the one hand you have a Biblical miracle story about Jesus' disciples feeding 5,000 people with a few loaves of bread and a few fish. On the other hand we have a story about one wealthy couple following Jesus' teachings, and from the seed of their idea thousands and thousands of lives have been touched. Might both be stories that tell us something about abundance created out of compassion and shared commitment?

I don't think there is any neat and tidy answer about miracles. Maybe the message is only this: We are not supposed to believe the impossible, but every once in a while it shows up anyway, just to keep us on our toes, reminding us to keep all the doors and windows of our being wide open. It is not impossible that we, ourselves, might be the ones to make miracles. ■



From Your Minister

BY MEG RILEY
SENIOR MINISTER,
CHURCH OF THE
LARGER FELLOWSHIP

Through the years I have heard people use the word *miracle* to describe things that I would assign other names: good luck, good medicine, pure chance, hard work. Overall, I'm with the *everything is a miracle* camp, one of those people who use the word often and mean it.

It's a miracle that any kid makes it to adulthood alive. It's a miracle that any marriage makes it twenty years. It's a miracle that we don't all hit each other's cars on the freeway every day. It's a miracle that buildings, bridges and airplanes, built by human minds and hands, generally do what they're supposed to do, staying miraculously upright and aloft.

It's a miracle that we can breathe, speak, sing, read poetry, love.

As we assembled this issue of *Quest*, we got into kind of a squabble on the team about the nature of miracles. "If everything's a miracle, nothing's really a miracle!" someone said. We argued about whether events described in various pieces of writing really qualified as miracles. In the end, we agreed that there is a good deal of subjectivity involved in this whole topic.

Generally speaking, I'm willing to accept anyone's experience of a miracle as what they call it, because why not? Who does it hurt? But some so-called miracles are actually something very different, not what I want to think of as miracles at all.

A compulsive gambler I know told me about a miracle he experienced. Just when he had maxed out all his credit cards, he miraculously received an offer for another one! This felt like a miracle to him because with a credit record as bad as his, he had not ex-

pected it. To me, it felt like a credit card company preying on a vulnerable person, not like a miracle at all. "Just check out those sky-high interest rates!" I noted, but he had already maxed out the new card, too. It will be a miracle if he is ever out of debt.

How many times have you heard someone say something along the lines of, "It was a miracle...I was supposed to be on that plane that crashed / in that building that burned / on that ship that sank, but God wanted to spare me." I am delighted that any life is spared from tragedies. But when people start

Maybe miracles— or curses—are simply in the eye of the beholder.

saying that God wanted to spare them, the only logical correlation is that God also wanted to kill the people who did die. And that's just not a God I know. I'd totally go along with "it's a miracle I'm alive," but not with the idea that it's part of a master plan, with God as a cosmic chess player orchestrating wins and losses.

I guess if miracles are remarkably good experiences against all odds, then it would be only reasonable to believe that the opposite of a miracle is a curse. I was once standing in a long bank line, trying to do some last minute business on my way out of town, when a woman burst in the door. "Is anyone driving an orange car?" she asked. I raised my hand; a sickening dread rose in me as well. I was driving an orange car because my green car, which I needed for a trip, had already been hit.

The green car had just replaced a white car, which itself had been hit, and then it got hit immediately after I took possession.

The orange car was a loaner I'd been

given as they fixed the green car, so I could drive it far, far away from all these accidents.

"Someone just hit your car in the parking lot," the woman told me as we walked out the door together. Involuntarily, with sobs threatening to overtake me, I moaned, "I am cursed!" She looked at me with utter kindness and said, "You are not cursed."

And, indeed, I was not cursed. Because when the driver who hit my latest car tried to slink away without so much as a note, this woman and her kids chased that driver down on foot in the parking lot! This woman I did not know, with so many kids in tow I couldn't count them all, had been my savior. The kids now surrounded the embarrassed driver who hit my car. It was something like a miracle!

Maybe miracles—or curses—are simply in the eye of the beholder. I could have come out of that incident in the bank parking lot focused on the curse of my series of damaged cars rather than the miracle of the family that ran (literally!) to my aid.

I would rather look for miracles—and I see people creating them around me all the time. The addict in recovery who said to me, "I don't know if God turned water into wine, but I know that God turned me into a sober person." The parents who struggled with infertility, adopted a child, and said, "There is no other child in the world who could ever be more ours than this one! Thank God we were infertile or we would have had the wrong child!" The woman who got a kidney donor just when she would otherwise have died.

I've heard many of these stories, and they never cease to fill me with wonder. While the rational part of me could attribute them to luck or chance or happenstance, I like being on the lookout for miracles. I like to watch for them and claim them as they come by. Personally, I would say there's no such thing as too many miracles! ■



REsources for Living

BY LYNN UNGAR, MINISTER FOR LIFESPAN LEARNING, CHURCH OF THE LARGER FELLOWSHIP

I've always loved the line from *Alice Through the Looking Glass* in which the Red Queen declares, "Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast." It delights me to think about an actual practice of believing in things that will never be true, like being invisible or pet unicorns or flying without wings. Believing impossible things has led people to create and dare and dream and make the world of the possible bigger than we thought it was.

But I've become less enthusiastic about believing impossible things these days, or less comfortable at any rate. In the political world it seems like there are an awful lot of people who are determined to believe in impossible things

"Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."

in ways that do outright damage. Believing that giving money to rich people will help poor people, for instance, is a downright destructive thing that a lot of folks seem determined to believe.

When you believe that natural resources are unlimited, and that you can drill and mine and chop without consequences for everyone, you are believing in an impossible thing that ravages this earth. Denying scientific findings because you don't like the results is believing in impossible things, and the costs can be dreadful.

So which is it? Is believing in impossible things a beautiful trait of dreamers and creative pioneers, or is it just an excuse to be intellectually lazy when



what you want doesn't match up with the facts?

Those questions seem especially relevant this

time of year, when we celebrate two different holidays that tell stories that feature impossible things—what we usually describe as *miracles* when we're talking religion. The Passover story is full of miracles: a bush that burns but is not consumed, a walking stick that turns into a snake, a whole series of punishing plagues, a sea that splits open to let people walk through. All of them quite impossible. The Easter story, of course, is centered on a man who is dead for three days and comes back to life. That doesn't really happen.

So what do we make of these miracles? Do we declare them silly and unscientific, and dismiss the holidays that go with them as equally so? Or do we commit ourselves to trying to believe impossible things, so that we can keep the beauty of the holidays?

I think the key might lie in the subtle difference between an impossible thing and a miracle. An impossible thing, dreadful or charming, is really just a thing that can't happen. Believing in it as an act of imagination or fantasy is fine, but it's a terrible thing to base policy decisions on.

But a miracle is a little bit different. A miracle is an impossible thing that points us toward something greater. The miracles of the Passover story point toward God being on the side of the enslaved Hebrews, and making their liberation possible when there was no conceivable means of escape. The miracle of Jesus' re-birth points toward the sacred truth that things are forever dying and being re-born, that endings often lead directly to new beginnings that we might never have imagined.

There are two words in the Bible that are translated as *miracle*, but a more accurate translation would put those

words as *signs* and *wonders*. A miracle is something that catches your attention, a sign that points you toward some truth that you wouldn't otherwise have seen. Or it is something that makes you catch your breath in amazement, fills you with awe and wonder.

A miracle doesn't have to be impossible, but it does need to be extraordinary enough that it pulls you out of everyday stumbling around just getting things done and into something higher or deeper or wider than what you had seen before. Which means that you might experience a miracle seeing a baby being born or reading a really good book or climbing to the top of a mountain. You might experience a restored relationship as a miracle or you might miraculously find yourself free from a habit or addiction that was making your life too small.

Biblical miracles are events that remind people that God is at work in the world. That might not be a definition that appeals much to you, but the not-quite-impossible thing that I like to believe before breakfast is similar: we are connected to one another and to the other beings of this planet in ways that we can neither fully see nor fully understand. Sometimes a miracle drags us out of our self-centered ways and gives us a glimpse of that larger thing to which we belong. ■

Sometimes we make our own miracles. Consider, for example, the existence of the CLF, a church without walls, available around the world, at any hour of the night or day, to anyone who comes seeking connection, compassion and spiritual growth.

Please be a part of making this miracle by supporting the CLF as generously as you can, either by returning a check in the enclosed envelope or by giving online at www.clfuu.org/give



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Small Miracles

BY JASON, CLF MEMBER INCARCERATED
IN FLORIDA

Miracles. Everybody always gets so worked up over that word. But you only ever hear about these strange, over-the-top things, like a bleeding crucifix, or a statue of the Virgin Mary that cries, or the mysterious remission of cancer in Great Aunt Sally.

Nobody ever really talks about the little miracles that happen every day. The couple that tried for years to have a baby, and suddenly are expecting. The child that spent his whole ten years of life in the foster system, now getting adopted. The stranger who helps the homeless. Or even the first cry of a newborn.

All of these—each and every one—are miracles at least as precious as those founded in a particular faith, and are just as worthy of our awe and recognition.

So, what miracles have you witnessed today? ■

