

Grace and Miracles

Do you like riddles? Try this-

What is it that can be described as follows:

- refuses to ask for help or directions
- probably has emotions but hides them
- speaks to those who speak to them
- often reluctant about going to someone else's home for dinner??

What am I describing? A man! Of course!

Then along comes this Jesus guy! Not only was he the opposite of this, the ideal for masculine fulfilment, but his charisma was undeniable. His words and his ways had magnetic power. He held the attention of crowds for hours and often days at a time. John 1:14 says that he came to earth, full of grace and truth. We understand grace as love and kindness, generosity and compassion, not earned, not deserved, just freely given, no strings attached! Grace! Jesus spoke of a God who lavishes grace upon one and all. But despite his emphasis on grace, no one could accuse Jesus of watering down the holiness of God.

This Jesus who we are trying to get to know better chose some disciples, some people to mentor and carry on his ministry. Let's take a quick look at them and consider what they tell us about Him! Apparently they were abundantly ordinary. Perhaps that gives you and I some hope! They were not Rhodes scholars. They were not the heads of multi-national companies. They seem not to have possessed a great

deal of native talent, and their perfectibility or potential for greatness is at least questionable.

But from this ragtag group came a church that is still going strong. Jesus and his little band of followers had no permanent base of operation. They wandered from town to town without much discernable strategy....no identifiable game plan.

But they left no one they met, untouched by grace and love. Getting by on little or nothing, facing any assortment of challenges, look at what they have done!

I want to say something about grace from the perspective of two renowned Russian others.

Fyodor Dostoevsky was nearly put to death early in his life. He was spared at the last instant. He spent 10 years in exile pouring over the New Testament. He emerged from exile, unshakeable in his Christian convictions. While in prison he came to believe that only through being loved is a human being capable of love. How can we each learn from Jesus, the importance of love?

On the other hand, Leo Tolstoy understood God as inflexible and absolute. His intensity for God and for perfection caused his family to feel like victims of his quest for holiness. His wife indicated that there was very little genuine warmth about her husband. His kindness, she said, did not come from his heart but merely from his principles -cold and measured. The gospel was nothing but a burden – absent of grace. Tolstoy relentlessly pursued faith but could not trust God's grace to overcome the imperfection of his humanity and thereby his inadequacy. His high ideal of the Gospel prevented him from accepting

the reality of humanity. He was so aware that he could never measure up and could never accept that we don't have to. He always felt unloved and unworthy of being loveable.....no grace. Jesus gave us God's ideal so that we should never stop trying. Tolstoy never found grace, and hence he never found peace. He lived a tortured life of faith. Is that what the Jesus you know wants for us?

And then there is the whole commotion about the miracles he performed. What can we get to know about Jesus, through the amazing miracles?

In the gospels, there are 3 dozen incidents of miracles. Some of them group healings. The miracles affected a small number of people in a small corner of the world.

The only miracle in all 4 gospels is the feeding of the 5000 on grassy hills near the shores of Galilee.

Some of the miracles He performed created distance between he and his disciples. When he calmed the storm, the disciples were terrified by his power and they drew back.

Some of the miracles caused such a commotion that the gathered crowds wanted to seize him by force. Some of those gathered were simply gawkers and thrill seekers. This was not about faith and the things of God for them.

From Jesus' perspective, his miracles were not done to bowl people over and seduce them into believing. Otherwise there would be no room for faith. He did no 'on demand' stuff. Remember Lazarus and Mary and her sister Martha.

You will notice that Jesus tried to hush up many of the miracles he performed, wary of the type of faith they produced and concerned about the type of attention they would attract. A momentary spectacle for a momentary attraction verses a lifelong commitment to God.

It was not for fundraising or fame. Jesus' motivation to perform miracles was grace and compassion. When he healed the blind man, Jesus denied that the man's blindness came from any sin either he or his ancestors committed. He dismissed the common opinion that tragedies happen to those who deserve them. Luke 13 reads as follows, "At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. Jesus asked them, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you: but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. Or, those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them – do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did." Jesus wanted the sick to know that they were especially loved, not cursed by God.

And do you know what? People in Jesus' day found it no easier to believe in miracles any more than we do!

The Jesus You Never Knew. I hope it does not stop here. It is a lifelong adventure! I pray that God will deepen your faith and open your mind and your heart to the second aspect of the Trinity in a way you never dreamed possible. It was true for the disciple and countless others down through the centuries. It can be true for you.

God bless you on the journey.

Amen