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Say it with flowers

Does God still perform miracles? Yes, if you look for the signs and wonders in everyday life, says Mark Ralls.

by [Mark Ralls](#)



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As a pastor, I am routinely asked: “Why don’t miracles happen anymore?”

I have fielded this one enough times to develop a standard response. I tell people that in the Bible, miracles are called “signs and wonders.” In other words, there are two different categories of miracles. Wonders are what we normally think of as miraculous. Wonders are the earth-shattering, teeth-rattling, out-of-the-clear-blue occurrences that render us awestruck. The Red Sea parting. Manna raining down from the sky. The walls of Jericho that came “a tumblin’ down.” Jesus whipping up a banquet for 5,000 from a bag of biscuits and a handful of mackerel. These are unexpected, extraordinary events that are aptly named. They overwhelm us in wonder.

But, I explain, there is another kind of miracle Scripture calls “signs.” Signs are everyday, ordinary occurrences that at first glance do not appear remarkable. Most of Jesus’ parables involve signs. A tiny

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mustard seed grows into a tree so large that an eagle can nest in its branches while a bear rests in its shade. A father picks up his skirt and runs to meet his wayward son. Everyday stuff, but miraculous nonetheless.

Signs may not take our breath away. Yet, in their own quiet way, they reveal the grace and love and mercy of God. “Don’t worry,” I reassure people. “If wonders seem in short supply these days, simply look about for signs.” My parishioners typically receive all of this with polite disappointment. “My pastor,” they must think, “has no earthly idea why miracles don’t happen anymore.”

I would like to tell all my disappointed parishioners about Ralph. This summer, Ralph witnessed a miracle on our church campus -- what I would call a bona fide *wonder*.

Ralph was volunteering in our Dining & Caring Center in the basement of our church, when a woman approached him. In the center, folks can receive everything from a warm meal to a bicycle or a haircut. The woman who stood before him, however, wanted none of these. She was in search of flowers. Earlier that week, her son-in-law had been killed in an accident while working at his job as an auto mechanic. His funeral was scheduled for the following day, but when it came time to purchase flowers for the service, the family was a little short.

Ralph was not sure what to do, but he was determined to do something. “Stay here,” he said to our guest as he ascended the stairs. His first thought was that perhaps the flowers from Sunday’s worship service had been left on the altar. But Ralph never made it to the sanctuary. As soon as he reached the top of the stairs, he saw a woman coming in his direction across the church parking lot. She was carrying a bouquet of white flowers. She walked up to him. Ralph was so taken aback by this, all he could think to say was, “Hey, where did you get those flowers?” “Would you like them?” she replied and, smiling broadly, handed Ralph the bouquet.

Ralph bounded down the stairs and was greeted with disbelief from our guest and the volunteers around her. As you might imagine, news of this wonder-full event spread through our congregation like a kitchen fire. Folks started to drop by my office to ask if I thought the mysterious woman had been an angel.

I decided to ask Ralph, and he seemed nonplussed by the whole thing. “Mark, I was a chemical engineer. I’m not even sure I believe in angels. But I can’t explain away what happened that day. I guess I wouldn’t be surprised to learn that she was an angel. But I also wouldn’t be surprised to find her sitting in my pew some Sunday morning -- a member I’ve never met. To me, it doesn’t really matter. Either way, God is trying to tell us something.”

Ralph’s wise response expresses the biblical approach to miracles. Whether wonders or signs -- or perhaps a little of both -- it does not matter. Either way, God speaks.

I don’t know why seas no longer part and manna refuses to rain, but I do know that miracles still happen. I’ve encountered too many folks like Ralph to doubt it. God still speaks through wind and fire, and, on occasion, with flowers.