



**January 14, 2007**

Preaching: Rev. Ronni Verboom

1 Corinthians 12:4-11

John 2:1-11

## “Can You Spot the Miracle?”

When I was a kid I loved picture puzzles you’d run across in coloring books or on the comics page of the newspaper. Under an elaborate drawing of a family at a picnic, the directions would ask, “Can you spot the five chickens in the picture?” You’d need to look closely, but sure enough, there in the cloud formations would be a chicken floating on its side, and in the leaves on the trees there’d be another, and in the lines making up the picnic table and several people’s legs you’d find another, and so on.

I was tickled when the “Where’s Waldo?” books came out. They originated in England, I think, but soon spread across the globe. I have only one book, and it’s from France, where they call Waldo “Charlie”. (Show book.) The tall skinny guy in the red and white sweater and hat is Waldo (or Charlie, depending on your location). He’s in every detailed picture somewhere. The trick is to spot him.

Others of you may remember the “Magic Eye” pictures that shifted into a 3D alternate reality if you could focus, or UNfocus your eyes just right. I have a dismal track record on seeing 3D images in the Magic Eye books- but the few times I have done it were startling and amazing.

The life of faith is something like examining visual puzzles, Where’s Waldo and Magic Eye books. The Holy Spirit gives us eyes to see things differently. We’ve run into this truth many times as we have reflected on Scripture. The two readings assigned for today reveal that message once again. Maturing in faith leads us to see the magic, the miraculous, the glory of God in everyday places and situations.

Let's think about the Gospel lesson first. This is Jesus' first miracle recorded in the Gospel of John. Many of you know this story. I've always been intrigued by the interaction here between Jesus and his mom.

Jesus, his friends, and his mother are all together at a wedding, enjoying themselves at the reception. Picture Jesus laughing, talking, joking with friends. Suddenly, his mom appears at his elbow. He senses her presence. Interrupting his conversation, he turns to her. Looking at him pointedly she says, "They are all out of wine."

Is this familiar? Is this ordinary? Is this everyday, or what? You're standing in your kitchen, getting ready to sit down to a holiday meal with friends or family, and your spouse, sibling or parent approaches you, saying with some urgency, "We're out of milk!" – or bread, butter, salt.

What's your response? Often we say, "Well, what do you want ME to do about it?" We may feel exasperated. Are we being asked to run to the store? Will the store be open on a holiday? Why am I the person singled out to handle the emergency?

I love this story about Jesus. It looks like his response was pretty much like ours. He says, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?" MOtherrr, how is that your business??- I KNOW it's not MY business! Don't be pushing me to do something here, right now!

Then, I really LOVE this story, what does Mary do? She turns to the servants and tells them, "Do whatever he says." It's as if you're standing in the kitchen saying, "What do you want ME to do—we're out of milk, but I'm not even sure the stores are open!!-- and your family member hands you the car keys, saying sweetly, "And pick up some bananas, too, while you're there, OK?"

And Jesus, sweet Jesus, takes the keys and goes for the milk and bananas. It's so wonderful. Mary ignores his objections, and Jesus does what his Mom wants him to do. He changes the water into wine for the party. And it's not ordinary wine. It's the best anyone has ever tasted. If you're going to do something, you might as well do it right, my mom always taught me. Maybe she got that from Jesus.

This miracle is very different from all the others Jesus performed. It served no apparent moral purpose. It did not teach a moral lesson. There is no healing, no dread disease, no confrontation with religious leaders. There is no radical call to follow Jesus, no dangerous storm threatening human life, no death to be turned to resurrected life.

Yet this miracle DOES teach a lesson. It is a SIGN of the beginning of Jesus work as God's own Messiah, the Christ. That's probably why it was included in John's account of Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

It also shows us the Messiah's rule extends to and takes place within familiar and routine experiences of life. Miracles happen. God does mighty things at gatherings of friends, at parties and meals of regular, ordinary people every day. God is involved in our kitchens and on trips to the store when we run out of milk. God is in Baker Hall every Sunday when we gather to munch cookies and sip coffee and lemonade. These places are like the settings of Where's Waldo books. Can you spot the miracles in the many details and designs of our lives day by day?

In the kitchen peeling potatoes, an older sister tells a younger one, "Do you know how much I admire you for your caring heart and loving ways?" And the younger one, who always felt she could never live up to her sister's example, is astonished and moved to tears.

A son who had been distant from his family for several years shows up on Father's Day as a surprise, and gives his parents each a long hug when he leaves, saying, "I really want to see you guys more than I have been."

A teen in the family, at the end of the evening meal says, "Hey, I don't have any homework tonight- you all relax, I'll take care of the dishes and the kitchen." God's Spirit accomplishes amazing miracles!! I've seen them, I've marveled at them!

A church acquaintance chats with you at Coffee Fellowship. He mentions his dad has just been diagnosed with cancer. Your own dad battled that same illness. Soon, the chitchat moves to something deeper, and a supportive friendship begins.

When hearts are softened and honest love is expressed, that's a miracle. When hands willingly work for others, that's a miracle.

When we look at the events in our lives with the Holy Spirit's help, we will spot the presence and working of God.

What about the other Scripture, taken from Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth? I believe it teaches us a similar message, but asks us to look for the Holy Spirit's presence WITHIN PEOPLE, as well as in the EVENTS of life.

The Apostle Paul knew there were problems in the church he helped found in Corinth. People were mixed up about the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts. Some were

saying certain gifts were for INDIVIDUALS for PERSONAL gain. Paul wrote to set them straight, explaining that NO gift of God is EVER given, except for the good of the WHOLE COMMUNITY. If it doesn't serve the common good, it's not a gift from God's Spirit. It's as simple as that, he said.

Paul also wrote to set them straight about another idea--- some were saying certain gifts were better than others. Paul named it clearly: No gift is better than another, and no Christian is without a gift.

Paul's teaching us we have to start looking at people differently. Think of each person as a page in a Where's Waldo book. Innumerable details make up that person. But hidden in the total picture are gifts of the Holy Spirit—the miracle of God's own being working in and through that person. When we look at each other, Paul teaches, we're being asked, "Can you spot the miracle of the Holy Spirit's gifts?"

Here's our assignment, from these Scriptures:

Look for miracles each day in your ordinary life—with God's help you will spot them.

Look at the events that take place.

Look at the people around you.

And finally—and this may be the hardest—look for miracles IN YOURSELF.

We may accept the truth that in each day, in events and relationships, there are miracles to be spotted. We may even accept that each person around us presents a detailed picture in which the miracle of the Holy Spirit and its gifts can be spotted. But, can we include OURSELVES in this overall scheme? God declares that we each are a miracle of his own designing.

Life is a delight, when we begin to see with God's eyes. Experiment with ways of looking and seeing, just like you do with visual puzzles. Don't lose heart. God will help you—You WILL spot God's miracles over and over and over again, once you begin to LOOK for them. And don't forget to look at yourself, a miracle of God sent to this world to use your gifts for the good of all. **God plants the miraculous in the middle of regular stuff. Even in us. AMEN!!Amen. Amen.**