

Michael J. Mathey
Easter VII, Ascension Day (observed) & Confirmation
May 17, 2026
Text: Acts 1:6 – 26
Title: Miracles

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. When I say the word “Miracle” what comes to mind? Many of us probably think of one of our Savior’s miracles such as feeding 5000 people with five loaves of bread and two fish, taking a walk across the surface of the Sea of Galilee to meet up with His disciples, or healing any one of a number of people who were incurable. These events were certainly miracles, or “signs” as the Gospel of John calls them. Jesus did these things to get the attention of the crowds that followed Him throughout His earthly ministry. But the time of Jesus isn’t the only time that we see miracles in the history that God’s Word gives to us. We find these things called miracles throughout God’s Word, but that’s not necessarily the only place that they’re found. Many people claim to witness miracles even today, but are these events the real thing? It’s hard to judge authenticity, but these things called miracles seem to fall into a few different categories.

The first category includes events that we can easily identify as acts of God. These are the types of things that you will find in the pages of God’s Word, but that have happened in our day and age. Perhaps a house was spared in the path of a large and destructive tornado. Maybe a person survived that storm even when their house was destroyed with them in it. Or a child might have been hit by a car, but was still alive with only a few scratches and bruises, a true event that happened to someone I know. A different example might be found in surviving a normally fatal disease such as the advanced stages of cancer. The doctors were certain it was the end, but the tests now show no cancer. It’s just gone. It would be easy to look at any one of these situations with the eyes of faith and be able to see God intervening for the people affected.

The next category contains events that people don't necessarily notice. The father driving his two small children to the park hesitates for no reason at the green light, and he is there just long enough to miss the speeding pick-up truck that runs the red light crossing the intersection. If the father had started driving through the intersection just a few seconds sooner, the truck would have slammed into the side of the car with the two kids in the backseat. What made him hesitate? He has no idea. But his hesitation saved the lives of everyone that would have been involved because that truck didn't stop, and it was high enough and fast enough that it would probably have driven onto the car's roof. From the perspective of faith, it can be argued that the hesitation was the result of God's intervention, what some would consider a miracle.

A third category has numerous different events that many wouldn't even consider miracles. To some people these things are just normal, everyday events, but looked at from a different perspective they might fall into a certain definition of miracle. Anyone who has held a newborn baby knows this sense of the miraculous even though babies are born all the time. Miracles can be seen throughout God's creation in things that happen every day, but wouldn't even exist without God having acted in the first place. Only someone who is using the eyes of faith would be able to see these seemingly ordinary events as being examples of God's miraculous works.

Truth be told, a definition of the word "miracle" from a faithful Christian perspective is relatively simple. A miracle is happening whenever God is at work in His Creation. It doesn't have to be something extraordinary and supernatural; that only happens once in a life-time. It can be something that happens every week. Every person who witnesses the event happening doesn't have to acknowledge it as a miracle. It just has to be the result of God's action, and it will be a miracle whether people want to admit it or not.

So, what are you supposed to do when you see a miracle? What's an appropriate response? For the answers we turn to the first chapter of Acts. The miracle of Christ's Ascension into heaven is recorded just before today's reading, and the Christian Church has historically celebrated that miracle on the Thursday just before the Last Sunday of Easter, in other words this past Thursday which some of us gathered to celebrate. The first chapter of Acts tells us, "So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.' And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.'"

The miracle of Jesus' Ascension is not given much emphasis these days, but it's considered one of the 7 high feasts of the church year. Ascension is a Feast that is often forgotten because it falls in the middle of the week, and people are typically too busy to give it much attention. But the Ascension is the celebration of the Son's return to His rightful place with His Father. His time of humiliation as a mortal man on the earth has ended, and now His time of exaltation as the fully glorified Son of God has begun. And now with His Ascension into heaven, He "...sits at the right hand of the Father..." And how do the apostles respond to witnessing this miracle? They stand around looking up into the sky. It takes two angels appearing to bring them back to earth and to the here and now.

Witnessing a miracle can bring about that kind of reaction, if you know that what you're looking at is a miracle. These men were in awe of the miracle that they had seen right before their very eyes. It was obvious to all of them that they were seeing yet another example of God working in His creation, and all that they wanted to do was stay there to get another glimpse of Jesus. Their reaction to the miracle was to stay where they were, but they got so caught up in what they were seeing that they almost forgot the instructions that Jesus had given them, to stay in Jerusalem until He sent the Holy Spirit to them. It took the angels speaking to them for them to refocus their attention on God's Word to them.

The other way to respond to a miracle is what happens in today's reading. "Then they returned to Jerusalem...And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying...All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers." The response here is prayer. The apostles returned to Jerusalem and joined the others just like they had been told, and they spent their time in prayer.

Then this reading shows us a second miracle, and that is the selection of a new apostle. Judas Iscariot is dead, and a replacement is needed to fill his spot. Out of the 120 disciples present, they choose two men who had witnessed with them the Baptism of Jesus, His ministry, His resurrection, and the Ascension. After praying for the Lord to guide the decision, they cast lots and select Matthias to become the twelfth man. Once again, the Lord acts in the lives of His faithful people and in His Creation. He provides a miracle.

It's amazing that we can have God acting all around us, but not realize the miracles that He is performing, such as continuing to grow and sustain His Church with each new generation. As we read His Word, it's easy to see His miracles, but in our daily life it becomes a little bit

harder. And when we don't see Him working His miracles, we won't respond in the ways that the apostles have shown us. The result is a focus on ourselves and our work instead of on God and His work. Even as we sit here this morning, we are guilty of this very thing. We miss God's work happening right in front of us in worship, and we convince ourselves that we are doing something for God. But that misses the mark completely.

Worship is always, first and foremost, the miracle of God coming to us and serving us. As we come together around His Word and Sacraments, God is working in His Creation for us. He comes to us through His Word to proclaim the Gospel of Christ, and to forgive our sins in the words of the Absolution. He comes to us through His Sacraments to deliver His gifts and to strengthen and heal our faith. In these things, God is coming to us and performing the miracle of delivering His gifts to us every week, and, in our ignorance, we somehow convince ourselves that we are giving something to God instead of responding humbly to His gracious gifts as Peter tells us to do in today's epistle.

But in His miraculous mercy, God doesn't hold against us our failures to recognize and respond to His miraculous work. Instead, He gives us an abundance of the forgiveness that we need, and He provides us with regular opportunities to grow in our faith in Him, just as these confirmands have grown in their faith and will continue to grow in it in the years ahead. The Lord even keeps His promise to send the Holy Spirit to us so that we may be strengthened in our faith and given the ability to endure the attacks of the devil. And as Peter tells us, "...the God of all grace...will restore, confirm, strengthen and establish you." Now that's a miracle that can only come to us because of the victory that Christ has won for us by rising from the grave. Rising indeed. Alleluia. Amen.