

AUGUST, 2014 MESSAGE by Patricia Adams

I'VE BEEN LISTENING TO ONE OF THE GREAT TEACHER'S/ AUDIO TAPES YOU CAN BUY NOW, ON TRANSCENDENTALISM AND THOUGHT I WOULD TALK A BIT ABOUT THOREAU, EMERSON AND THEIR THEOLOGICAL VIEWS. AS I THOUGHT ABOUT THIS, I REALIZED THESE THOUGHTS OF MINE SEEMED VERY FAMILIAR – AND WHEN I LOOKED BACK AT MY TALK LAST SUMMER, "THE DIVINE IN NATURE", I SAW IT WAS A TALK ON NATURE AND TRANSCENDENTALIST PHILOSOPHY.

THEN I LOOKED AT MY OTHER TALKS – AND IT OCCURRED TO ME THAT I TEND TO TALK ABOUT THE SAME THING.

IT MADE ME THINK OF THE MINISTERS –WHO TRY TO COME UP WITH SOME NEW THOUGHTS EVERY SINGLE WEEK. IT ALSO MAKES ME APPRECIATE MARY EVEN MORE –= AND WE ALL DO APPRECIATE HER – AS SHE MUST GIVE AROUND 8 MESSAGES EVERY SUMMER.

WHILE ALL THIS WAS CIRCLING AROUND IN MY HEAD, I DECIDED TO READ THE OTHER MESSAGES FROM THIS SUMMER, WHICH AS I ASSUME YOU ALL KNOW, ARE POSTED ON THE FOBC WEBSITE. MANY THANKS TO GINNY LAWRENCE FOR DOING SUCH A GREAT JOB WITH THE WEBSITE.

WE ACTUALLY TALK ABOUT MANY OF THE SAME THINGS – GRACE, FAITH, INTERPRETATIONS OF GOD AND THE DIVINE, HOW ONE CAN EXPLAIN MIRACLES. OUR CHURCH COMMUNITY IS AN ON-GOING 'DISCUSSION GROUP' OR PHILOSOPHICAL SALON, IF YOU WILL.

ALTHOUGH OUR SPEAKERS TALKED ABOUT A NUMBER OF THINGS, I JUST WANTED TO HIGHLIGHT SOME OF THE TOPICS.

BOB TALKED ABOUT 'SEEING GOD IN THE WORLD' AND NOTED THAT PEOPLE OF FAITH IN GOD SEE THE WORLD AS ONE IN WHICH GOD ACTS. HE DIFFERENTIATED BETWEEN *SEEING- AS* AND BELIEVING.

SALLY TALKED ABOUT SAUL ON THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS AND HOW HIS SALVATION WAS THROUGH GOD'S GRACE AND NOT BY THE LAW.

MARY TALKED ABOUT BEING OPEN, READY FOR INSPIRATION, NOTING THAT THE CREATIVE ACT CAN, IN ITSELF, BE A GIFT, LIKE AN ACT OF GRACE.

ED TALKED ABOUT INTREPRETING THE BIBLE AND 'THE POVERTY OF OUR THOUGHTS' IN TRYING TO COMPREHEND GOD.

GARY TALKED TO US LAST WEEK ABOUT BUDDHISM AND THE ROLE OF COMPASSION.

WE FOLLOW THE OLD TRADITION OF THE TRANSCENDENTALISTS . THEY ALSO MET AND EXCHANGED IDEAS ABOUT THE SAME SUBJECTS. (YES, I WILL AGAIN TALK ABOUT THE TRANSCENDENTALISTS).

FOR INSTANCE AT A MEETING IN THE HOUSE OF GEORGE AND SOPHIA RIPLEY , THE GROUP DISCUSSED THE ESSENCE OF RELIGION AS DISTINCT FROM MORALITY. ANOTHER TOPIC WAS 'THE EDUCATION OF HUMANITY.'

A FEW MONTHS LATER AT BRONSON ALCOTT'S HOME. (THE FATHER OF LOUISA MAY) THERE WAS A MEETING TO TALK ABOUT "IS MYSTICISM AN ELEMENT OF CHRISTIANITY?"

IT IS THIS TOPIC – MYSTICISM, OR AS I WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT TODAY, HOW ARE MIRACLES AN ELEMENT OF CHRISTIANITY?

TO HELP THINK THIS THROUGH, I'VE TURNED TO THE TEACHINGS OF RALPH WALDO EMERSON

EMERSON WAS AN ORIGINAL AND BRAVE THINKER WITH HIS BELIEF IN THE OVER SOUL, THE NEED FOR SELF RELIANCE AND HIS REJECTION OF DOGMATIC RELIGIONS.

On July 15, 1838, Emerson was invited to [Harvard Divinity School](#) for the school's graduation address, which came to be known as his "[Divinity School Address](#)". Emerson discounted Biblical miracles and proclaimed that, while Jesus was a great man, he was not God: historical Christianity, he said, had turned Jesus into a "demigod, as the Orientals or the Greeks would describe Osiris or Apollo".

His comments outraged the establishment and the general Protestant community. For this, he was denounced as an [atheist](#), and a *poisoner* of young men's minds. Despite the roar of critics, he made no reply, leaving others to put forward a defense. He was not invited back to speak at Harvard for another thirty years.

EMERSON ARGUED THAT ALL SCIENTIFIC CLAIMS OFFERED THEMSELVES AS ABSOLUTE STATEMENTS; WHEREAS ALL RELIGIOUS CLAIMS OFFERED THEMSELVES AS MATTERS OF PERSONAL BELIEF, WHICH COULD, AND OFTEN DID, COME INTO CONFLICT WITH OTHER BELIEFS.

OTHER GREAT THINKERS HAVE ARGUED AGAINST THE POSSIBILITY OF MIRACLES.

ED CERNY MADE A REFERENCE TO THIS IDEA IN HIS TALK, IT IS ALSO ATTRIBUTED TO FATHER [James Keller](#) , (OTTO FREIDRICH – FRIEND OF TIM FOOTE'S) THE ROMAN CATHOLIC PRIEST WHO FOUNDED THE CHRISTOPHERS – A T.V. PROGRAM IN THE 50'S AND 60'S. KELLER states that "The claim that God has worked a miracle implies that God has singled out certain persons for some benefit which many others do not receive implies that God is unfair. If God intervenes to save your life in a car crash, then what was he doing in [Auschwitz](#)?" Thus an all-powerful, all-knowing and just God, as predicated in Christianity, would not perform miracles.

SO WHAT DO WE DO WITH THESE CONFLICTING IDEAS ABOUT MIRACLES?

USUALLY ONE CAN INTERPRET THE RELIGIOUS MIRACLE STORY AS JUST THAT; A STORY THAT SHOWS SOME SPIRITUAL TRUTH WHICH WE COULD NOT OTHERWISE SEE. WALKING ON THE WATER DEFINES FAITH, THE BREAKING OF THE LOAVES AND FISHES ENGENDERED GENEROSITY. HOWEVER, THERE ARE TWO MIRACLES THAT CAN ONLY BE ACCEPTED OR REJECTED – THE MIRACLE OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH AND THE MIRACLE OF THE RESURRECTION. THESE EVENTS ARE CENTRAL TO CHRISTIAN FAITH.

IF YOU TAKE THESE TWO MAJOR MIRACLES AWAY FROM THE CHRIST STORY, YOU HAVE, AS EMERSON DESCRIBED IT, JESUS AS A GREAT MAN, BUT NOT GOD.

THIS IS A MAJOR CONUNDRUM FOR CHRISTIAN THEOLOGIANS; SOMETHING THAT HAS BEEN DISCUSSED FOR HUNDREDS OF YEARS. IT GOES BACK TO BOB'S TALK ABOUT *SEEING AS* AND *BELIEVING*.

OVER AND OVER, THE CONCEPT OF FAITH (RATHER THAN OBJECTIVE REASONING) IS TIED TO BELIEVING.

KIERKEGAARD TALKED ABOUT THE LEAP OF FAITH, HE ARGUED THAT GOD UNCONDITIONALLY ACCEPTS MAN, FAITH ITSELF BEING A GIFT FROM GOD. THE HIGHEST MORAL POSITION IS REACHED WHEN A PERSON REALIZES THIS AND NO LONGER DEPENDING UPON HER OR HIMSELF, TAKES THE LEAP OF FAITH INTO THE ARMS OF A LOVING GOD.

JESUS ALSO ARGUED THAT MIRACLES ARE MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH FAITH. HE SAID. "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'move from here to there' and it will move." ([Gospel of Matthew 17:20](#))

BELIEF AND FAITH ALSO GOES BACK TO THE GOSPEL READING WE HAD TODAY – FROM PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMANS

¹²For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. ¹³For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." ¹⁴But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? ¹⁵And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

THIS PASSAGE REMINDS ME OF SOMETHING THAT HAPPENED TO ME WHEN I WAS IN THE 7TH GRADE. MY BEST FRIEND AT THAT TIME WAS BOBBIE SOLOMAN. BEFORE BOBBIE, I HAD NEVER THOUGHT OF JEWS/GENTILES BUT BEING 'BEST FRIENDS' I SOON REALIZED THAT BOBBIE CERTAINLY DIDN'T 'TAKE CHRIST AS HER SAVIOR' – AS THE TERM WAS THEN. I WONDERED, IF YOU HAVE TO TAKE CHRIST AS YOUR SAVIOR, WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN TO BOBBIE? DOES THIS MEAN SHE WILL GO TO HELL JUST BECAUSE SHE'S JEWISH AND GOES TO SYNAGOG INSTEAD OF CHURCH?

I ASKED OUR PASTOR ABOUT THAT. I REALIZE THAT WOULD BE A HARD QUESTION TO ANSWER SO I AM SYMPATHETIC TO WHAT HE SAID, BUT IT CERTAINLY MADE ME RECONSIDER THINGS. HE SAID, 'BEING FRIENDS WITH BOBBIE GIVES YOU A GREAT OPPORTUNITY TO BRING CHRIST INTO HER LIFE' *How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!*" BUT I COULD NOT CONVINCED MYSELF THAT BOBBIE NEEDED ME TO GET TO HEAVEN, THESE ARE HARD QUESTIONS ABOUT CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND I WON'T TRY TO WORK THIS OUT TODAY. BUT I WILL SAY THAT

ALTHOUGH I FIND IT HARD TO ACCEPT, THE OLD *AND* NEW TESTAMENT MIRACLES AS LITERAL TRUTH, I CAN'T HELP BUT BELIEVE IN THE MIRACLES OF MY OWN DAILY LIFE. I'M NOT JUST TALKING ABOUT THE MIRACLES OF MODERN MEDICINE OR COMMUNICATION – BUT ABOUT THE THINGS THAT HAPPEN – OR DON'T HAPPEN THAT ARE, IN MY MIND MIRACULOUS,

HOW OFTEN DO WE SAY, 'THAT WAS A MIRACLE' – ACTUALLY IT IS USUALLY WHEN WE'VE JUST MISSED

TRADEGY, LIKE OUR FRIEND WHO WAS SCHEDULED TO BE ON ONE OF THE PLANES THT HIT THE WORLD TRADE CENTER BUT HAD TO CHANGE HIS FLIGHT AT THE LAST MINUTE.

WE ALL SHAKE OUR HEADS IN WONDER AT THE COINCIDENCE OR MIRACLE THAT WE EXPERIENCE.

PERHAPS WE DON'T ALL NEED THE 'BIG' MIRACLES FOR ENLIGHTENMENT, PERSONAL SALVATION OR AN AWARENESS OF THE DIVINE.

THIS IS WHAT EMERSON SAW AS A MIRACLE; A deep man believes in miracles, waits for them, believes in magic, believes that the orator will decompose his adversary; believes that the evil eye can wither, that the heart's blessing can heal; that love can exalt talent; can overcome all odds.

AGAIN, FROM EMERSON;

God does not have to reveal the truth, the truth could be intuitively experienced directly from nature. When asked his religious belief, Emerson stated "I am more of a Quaker than any-thing else. I believe in the 'still, small voice,' and that voice is Christ within us."

THIS TAKES US BACK TO OUR READING FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT—THE STORY OF ELIJAH

1 The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by."

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. **12** After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. **13** When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave

OUR MIRACLES SO OFTEN COMES THROUGH THE STILL SMALL VOICE THAT IS HIDDEN IN ALL PLACES, JUST WAITING FOR US.

Albert Einstein SAID;

There are two ways to live: you can live as if nothing is a miracle; you can live as if everything is a miracle.

I'LL TAKE THE SECOND WAY.

THIS VERY PLACE IS A MIRACLE.

HOW MANY PLACES ARE THIS SERENE, BEAUTIFUL AND SIMPLE. THE VERY FACT THAT THE 'CHURCH' ONLY OWNS THE FOOTPRINT IF THE BUILDING HAS MEANT THE CHURCH COULD NOT BE ENLARGED WITH FELLOWSHIP HALLS OR A KITCHEN – OR EVEN PLUMBING. BUT LOOK AT WHAT WE HAVE TODAY. IT IS A MIRACLE!

WE WERE SWIMMING FRIDAY EVENING IN WHAT'S CALLED THE GOLF COURSE SWIMMING HOLE AND TO BE ABLE TO LOOK INTO THE WATER THAT IS SO CLEAN YOU CAN SEE EVERY STONE, TO FLOAT DOWN IN THE WATER AND LOOK UP AT THE SKY CLEAR AND UNPOLLUTED. TO SEE, PERHAPS SOME NEIGHBORS AND A FEW CAMPERS, BUT NO CROWDS. KATE SAID, 'THE RICHEST PERSON IN CHINA COULD NOT BUY THIS. BUT HERE IT IS.'

IT WOULD BE HARD FOR ME TO ARGUE THAT I OR ANY OF US 'DESERVE' THIS. PERHAPS THAT'S WHAT ALSO DEFINES OUR OWN PERSONAL MIRACLES. THEY DON'T SEEM BASED ON BEING REWARDED FOR SOMETHING – THEY ARE 'GIVEN'. YOU SHAKE YOUR HEAD AND SAY, 'SOMEBODY UP THERE LIKES ME.' WHEN SOMETHING MIRACULOUS HAPPENS.

ENJOY THIS MIRACULOUS DAY.

ANOTHER DENIAL OF MIRACLES COMES FROM A PRACTICAL MATHEMATION; J. E. Littlewood suggested that individuals should statistically expect one-in-a-million events ("miracles") to happen to them at the rate of about one per month. By Littlewood's definition, seemingly miraculous events are actually commonplace

ED CHERNY QUOTED JOHN ADAMS THE SECOND PRESIDENT REFERRING TO OUR CONCEPT OF GOD.

When we say God is a spirit, we know what we mean, as well as we do when we say that the pyramids of Egypt are matter. Let us be content, therefore, to believe him to be a spirit, that is, an essence that we know nothing of, in which originally and necessarily reside all energy, all power, all capacity, all activity, all wisdom, all goodness."

THIS LED ME TO LOOK AGAIN AT

SOREN KIERKEGAARD –

⁵Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that "the person who does these things will live by them." ⁶But the righteousness that comes from faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) ⁷or 'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). ⁸But what does it say? "The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ⁹because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. ¹¹The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame."