

Seeds for Celebration
for the
JUBILEE! Community

A.H.S.C.K.NY.E:
EVERYDAY MIRACLES

Advent. Hanukkah. Solstice. Christmas. Kwanzaa. New Year. Epiphany

A.H.S.C.K.NY.E: Everyday Miracles

Advent: The miracle sense of anticipation and expectation. The word from which we get adventure.

Hanukkah: The miracle of an oil lamp staying lit for 8 days on barely enough oil to sauté an anchovy.

Solstice: The miracle of our tilted spinning earth beginning to lean itself so that the Northern Hemisphere can grow gardens and get a tan.

Christmas: The miracles of the birth of a little God/child to a teen-aged mom and her befuddled fiancé at tax time.

Kwanzaa: The miracle of love and home and community that somehow keeps appearing generation after generation.

New Year: The miracle that the earth has made it around the sun one more time and hasn't dumped us yet.

Epiphany: The miracle of some confused astrologers who followed a star which led them far from home to discover a baby king in a cattle trough.

Many, many folks around the world remember and celebrate these miracles all within a period of about 40 days. In Hebrew tradition, the number "40" meant an indeterminate amount of time. Noah and his zoo-ship cruised around while it rained 40 days and 40 nights. Moses went up to hang with God for 40 days. Twice. The whiny and unruly Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years. Elijah gobbled up what must have been a kick-ass angelic meal and then made it to Mt. Horeb 40 days later on that meal alone. And Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness trying to figure out his gig.

And this 40 day Advent to Epiphany sprint are what we call "holidays." That is to say, "Holy Days." And sometime they fly by so fast or drag on so long that time does seem indefinite. Unfixed. Confusing. These crazy days are when millions of people around the world celebrate the possibility that miracles happen, that God is with us and that we don't - or ever will - understand it all.

Why do we do this? Why put ourselves through the meals and gifts and parties and rituals and candles and fireworks and family hoohah - oh, the family hoohah! - year after year? Are we that starved for celebration? Are we stuck in a holiday rut? Or could it be that in some outrageous way, we humans crave the sense that miracles are real? We love to hear the miraculous stories again and again. We love to sing songs and decorate our homes and eat and drink and eat and drink and eat and drink and eat and drink in honor of these miracles.

And perhaps, in celebrating these ancient miracles, we open ourselves to the very real possibility that everything is finally a miracle. Everything. Every thing. Every friggin' thing. The fact that life exists, that we can see the moon or taste Aunt Mildred's rum cake or enjoy a tender smooch under the mistletoe or can even read these words and make some sense of them – all are miracles. All are truly beyond our understanding. All indicate that some sort of holiness is present and life is much grander and deeper than we could ever know.

You woke up this morning. You might not have; but you did. Miracle. The fact that the sun appeared on this same morning means the earth is still spinning at just the right speed and distance from the sun. It might not be happening; but it is. Miracle. You may well experience pleasure or pain today. Or both. And you might think about that experience or maybe even write a poem about it. Infinite possibilities. Miracle.

"Life is not measured by the number of breaths we breathe, but by the moments which take our breath away," quoth George Carlin. And you can guarantee that the more we come to recognize everyday miracles, the more our breath will be snatched away.

- Howard

AHSCKNYE: EVERYDAY MIRACLES

November 28, 2010: THE UNEXPECTED – Hanukkah

Psalm 80: 1-7

Let thy face shine that we may be saved.

Tao Te Ching Chapter 78 Eastern translation

Nothing is more supple than water; yet nothing is more powerful.

Mark 13: 33-37

You do not know when...

An old Yiddish proverb goes, "How do you make God laugh? Tell Him your plans." Even the old Yids knew that trying to plan out your life is like trying to plan the weather. You know it's gonna happen. You know it's not going away. You know you can do or not do certain things that may affect the outcome. But you can't orchestrate or choreograph it all. Your only option is to give it an educated guess and hope for the best.

The only consistent certainty is uncertainty. We can assume that the sun will come up in the morning; but we have no controls or guarantees. We can hope that we live through the day or that we will have food to eat or a warm place to sleep or that we will be loved. But there are no warranties available for any of that stuff. There are no service contracts for living. And even when we make vows and promises to our mates and our jobs, we all know that it's all too often the nature of vows to be broken.

So, if it's the nature of miracles to come unexpectedly, a case could be made that every time the sun comes up, it's a miracle. Every time we wake up breathing or remember our name or taste sweetness or share a yummy kiss, it's a miracle. Unanticipated. Unpredicted. Unforeseen.

Another proverb says, "Blessed are those who expect nothing; for they shall not be disappointed." A corollary for that maxim might be, "Blessed are those who are constantly surprised, for they shall see nothing but miracles."

AHSCKNYE: EVERYDAY MIRACLES

December 5, 2010: THE ODDEST OF PLACES

Psalm 85

Faithfulness will spring up from the ground.

Tao Te Ching Chapter 27 Western/Eastern translations

The bad man is the material from which the good draws lessons.

Mark 1: 1-8

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

An oil lamp burns for 8 days. A young teen gets pregnant with God. Evergreens are dragged into the home. A God/child is born in a dumpy little town at tax time. Playing drums, lighting candles and passing a chalice around a table are done to celebrate community. Three confused astrologers a long way from home see a star and get all giddy over it.

Say what? These are the roots and traditions of our holidays? Our holy days? Oil lamps and evergreens and cow-trough-cradles and bon fires and dining room tables and virgin wombs? This is where miracles happen and are celebrated? What were our ancestors smoking when they came up with these incongruent and unrelated events and places which we now call "miracles?"

And maybe that's the point. Or one of the points. Maybe part of the wisdom of these old stories and traditions comes in their subtle reminder to us that the miraculous almost always happens in the most unusual and bizarre places. Never front and center. Never in concert halls with stage lights and programs and box seats. These old stories and the ways we celebrate them are odd. And they happen in the oddest of places. Sort of like our own odd little lives. And our own strange little ways and spaces.

AHSCKNYE: EVERYDAY M IRACLES

December 12, 2010: IMPROBABLE GIFTS

Psalm 146: 5-9

The Holy One lifts up those who are bowed down.

Tao Te Ching Chapter 46 Western translation

There is no greater illusion than fear.

Luke 1: 26-37

Do not be afraid.

Many a story has been told of bad things that happen which end up being good things. Diagnosis of cancer which leads to a reawakening joy in living. Loss of job which leads to discovery of a new passion. Ugly divorce which leads to deeper appreciation of solitary living. Mentally challenged sibling which leads to a life-time of service to mentally handicapped kids. So many turn-around stories; so little time.

Why is it, then, that we forget all these stories when we are given a bitter pill to swallow? Why is it we assume that our bitter pill is only going to get more bitter and that nothing good can possibly come from it?

OK, OK, things don't always turn around. Good juju doesn't always come from bad booty. Sometimes, life sucks and continues to suck louder and louder. Sometimes we suffer and die and haven't a clue why it all happened.

But, without putting on the Pollyanna mask, without donning the rose-tinted spectacles, it is still possible to wonder with every pile of poop that's plopped on our plate what gift might be hidden there. An argument could be made, of course, that living like this is

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simply living in denial. But assuming that there is no silver lining in our own storm clouds is also denial – denial of the possibility that gifts come in the most improbable and implausible wrappings. Maybe that's why religious and spiritual teachers keep reminding us that one of the best guides for living a full and abundant life is the simple command: Be not afraid.

**AHCKNYE: EVERYDAY MIRACLES - Solstice
December 19, 2010: BEWILDERING BLESSINGS**

Psalm 89: 1-4

I have made a covenant with my chosen one.

Tao Te Ching Chapter 55 Western translation

...like a newborn child, its bones are soft, its muscles are weak; but its grip is powerful.

Luke 1: 39-47

Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

She's eighteen years old. And single. And pregnant. She never finished high school so she works 2 minimum wage jobs. The father of the baby is living with her. But he also works for minimum wage; and their combined income barely pays the rent, the utilities, car insurance and food. Their car cost them \$500 and – not so surprisingly - needs work. Health insurance? Nope. Money in savings? You gotta be kidding. Wealthy relatives? None that she knows about.

But she's radiantly happy about the miracle within her bulging belly. She'll pull up her shirt and show it to you. As happy as a dog with two tails, she talks excitedly about possible names and toys and how the baby's due date is so close to her own birthday. She is ecstatic. Delighted in and for this love child.

Older adults like myself want to be happy for her; but we know the challenges that lie ahead. We've seen other single moms struggle to keep their homes together. Struggle to keep food on the table and medicine in the cabinet. Struggle to find adequate daycare for their baby while they work. Struggle to get to work when the car breaks down. Struggle to live from paycheck to paycheck.

But her broad and genuine smile dispels – or at least lightens – the concerns we have for her. She is indisputably happy about that coming baby. And when our wisdom shines through, we rejoice with her.

**Christmas Eve: LOVE, DESPITE IT ALL, LOVE
December 24, 2010**

Luke 2: 1-20

And Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart.

Maybe one of the bigger mistakes we make while fishing in the polluted ponds of religion, is expecting to catch the same kind of fish again and again. We would prefer each fish to be a little larger than the last, perhaps. A little meatier. We'd like it to feed us a bit better than the one we caught here last Sunday. But, usually, we expect to catch the same kind of fish. Holy Trout, Inspirational Bass, Miracle Flounder. If we pull up something we don't recognize as religious, we usually throw it back. Certain kinds of fish, we figure, just shouldn't be living in spiritual ponds.

That's the problem with Love Fish. Love Fish come in so many shapes and forms, sizes and appearances that you might never guess they were part of the same species. And not only that, some of these Love Fish jump right into your boat without you even having to toss out a line. Those little suckers can flip themselves out of even the most polluted ponds and land right in your lap, flapping and slapping like they've know you all their lives.

That Love Fish named Jesus was like that. Flipped right out of the smelly muck of ancient Middle-Eastern culture and landed in the heart of Western Civilization. And we've been wondering who he is and what to do with him ever since.

**AHCKNYE: EVERYDAY MIRACLES - Kwanzaa
December 26, 2010: BLOSSOMS IN THE COLD**

Isaiah 61: 10- 62: 1-4

You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord.

Tao Te Ching Chapter 57 Western Translation

I let go and the people become...

Luke 2: 41-52

After 3 days they found him sitting among the teachers, listening and asking questions.

Did you know that some flowers bloom even in the winter? Snowdrops, for example, grow right out of the snow and flourish with lovely little white blossoms. Witch Hazel can do the same thing, popping out tiny yellow-gold stars in January. And even those Suhtuhnh show-offs known as Camelias (even the name sounds like a daughter of a family from Waycross, Georgia. My name is Camelia Lee. We're related to the great General.). Camelias can strike up some blossomy splendor well before spring kicks in.

Sometimes, we humans can do the same. Now and again we can bloom, blossom and show our colors in the most unusual seasons or circumstances. When someone's going through a dark night of the soul, for example, hearty little blooms occasionally appear. Or when troubled waters flood through, budding vines can form a bridge.

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But blossoms in the cold need fertilizer and nourishment. Community is an excellent plant food. As is compassion and forgiveness. Songs, dance and acts of simple kindness can often get the buds budding. Sometimes it's true that when the going gets tough, the tough get going. But often, tough times can produce miraculous blossoms of love. Remember that some of the most beautiful flowers in the world are fed with a pile of manure.

AHCKNYE: EVERYDAY MIRACLES - Epiphany

January 2, 2011: WHIRLWINDS OF JOY

Isaiah 60: 1-6

Then you shall see and be radiant.

Tao Te Ching Chapter 60 Eastern Translation

When the Tao prevails in the world, even ghosts and spirits become harmless.

Matthew 2: 1-12

When they saw the star, they were overwhelmed with joy.

Happiness is usually predictable. A promotion at work, an all-expense-paid vacation, having a great date with that hunk of burning love, winning the lottery. You can pretty much forecast that things like this will ice your cake and sweeten your tea with some sugary happiness.

Joy, on the other hand, is unpredictable. Even capricious. You never really know when or where joy is going to make a showing. You can invite her, but she never sends an RSVP. You can set a place for her at the table, but she might end up catching a burger and fries and feel too full to join you.

Joy has been known to show up on a regular basis in hospital rooms, even when the prognosis is lousy. She has been seen again and again in AA meetings, therapists' offices, student study cubicles and at even the most mundane or miserable job sites. She comes to funerals whether she's invited or not. And even those who lie anxiously awake at 2 in the morning, have gotten a whiff of her fragrance as she waltzes by the window.

Theologian Frederick Buechner describes joy as unpredictable as the One who bequeaths her. But wherever she comes from, one thing is certain: when she shows up, you'd best catch a dance with her as soon as possible. She's a gypsy, you see. She has no permanent address and you'll never persuade her to stay forever. But while you're dancing, you may well get the feeling that that moment, at least, is forever.