

For a while there was a very simple and quite crude installation of scaffolding and neon letters in a park next to Edinburgh Cathedral. It was put there by the artist Nathan Coley and it is to me one of the most wonderfully provocative pieces of art you can imagine.

It is almost impossible not to engage with the installation at a visual, a cognitive but more importantly an emotional level. 'There will be no miracles here' it reads with a backdrop of the Cathedral but also of beautiful trees and of scruffy teenagers sitting smoking and of lush hedgerows.

I think it is the perfect inspiration for a reflection on the Gospel passage this morning. A passage in which we read that the community and family which Jesus grew up in declared outright.. there will be no miracles here. I wonder whether the world and even the church has been drawn into the misguided belief ... there will be no miracles here?

Now I accept it is not always easy to embrace the opposite declaration that there will be miracles here. To read about the driving out of demons and healing of the sick is at first glance to be challenged with the supernatural. But consider again our reaction to the first statement that there will not be miracles!! Isn't our first reaction to respond in our hearts and minds to the fact that there are miracles going on around us every day. That a sign declaring 'no miracles here' in the setting of nature and of human interaction is so ironic. For we know the miracle of a tree's growth. We know the miracle of small healings which go on between friends in parks over a cigarette and a can of cheap lager. We know deep down without question that miracles happen in our universe every minute of every day. To state that 'no miracles will happen here' is in fact far more ridiculous than stating 'miracles will happen here'.

The truth is that in parks and streets and homes around our world demons are driven out and healings happen as a matter of course. Take a moment to think about the last time a demon of anxiety or fear or envy or hatred entered your life. A time when something or someone other than you was dictating how you think or feel. And then think about how that demon was overcome? I am willing to bet that it was driven out by a kind word or an embrace or a good deed. Or perhaps it still sits on your shoulder today that demon of anxiety or depression or sense of failure or guilt. And again I am willing to bet (although of course Vicar's shouldn't bet but you know what I mean) I am willing to make a case that your only hope in being free from that demon is through love and compassion and kindness of others .. and of God! Or when was the last time you were healed by the love of another. A time when you had been wounded by the actions of others. Left with a scar from someone's words or treatment of you. Again I am willing to guess that healing was found in the word and life and embrace of a neighbour or family member .. or even a stranger.

Miracles happen every day. Demons of hatred and fear are driven out when people care for us and listen to us. Healing happens when people stop to help us when we dropped our shopping or take time to notice when we are sad or down.

Jesus said to his disciples go into the world and drive out demons and anoint the sick that they might be healed. It is a command given to anyone who would want to follow Jesus' and be his disciples even today. But it is not a particularly remarkable mission in truth. It is a mission we can undertake despite the declaration of some that there will be no miracles here! Because you and I know there will be many many opportunities in the week ahead to drive out someone's demon of fear and loneliness. To heal someone's wound of feeling worthless or without hope. We can drive our demons and heal the sick simply through following Jesus' command to love one another. It's not supernatural. It doesn't require great powers or knowledge. Miracles will happen here if we understand that they are part of the everyday interaction of a community committed to love and care for one another in selfless and compassionate ways!

2 Corinthians 12:2-10  
New International Version

2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. 3 And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows— 4 was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell. 5 I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. 6 Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say, 7 or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 9 But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Mark 6:1-13  
New International Version  
A Prophet Without Honor

6 Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. 2 When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed.

“Where did this man get these things?” they asked. “What’s this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing? 3 Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joseph,[a] Judas and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him.

4 Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home.” 5 He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. 6 He was amazed at their lack of faith.

Jesus Sends Out the Twelve

Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village. 7 Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits.

8 These were his instructions: “Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. 9 Wear sandals but not an extra shirt. 10 Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. 11 And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, leave that place and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.”

12 They went out and preached that people should repent. 13 They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.