



Auckland Unitarian Church
Love beyond belief

A wrinkle in time: the Easter miracle?

Rachel Mackintosh © 9th April 2023

At the risk of being grandiose, I begin this sermon a bit like the person who wrote the gospel of Mark. It's more than 40 years since I read [Madeleine L'Engle's children's book, *A Wrinkle in Time*](#). I have thought about it and talked about it since, but I haven't relived it. (I didn't watch the film because I didn't want to risk my memory being ruined.)

Here is my telling of the bits that have stuck with me, with some interpositions along the way.

In *A wrinkle in Time*, we encounter the miracle of time and distance travel. The wise woman in the book asks the child Meg, "What is the shortest distance between two points?" And Meg answers what we generally think of as the correct answer (even though the world is round). Perhaps we learned it in geometry: "The shortest distance between two points is a straight line." Whereupon the wise woman takes up a piece of the cloth of her clothing and demonstrates: a wrinkle.

A wrinkle is the shortest distance between two points, as the two points are brought next to each other. When contemplating the straight line, we can see a distance, perhaps long, perhaps arduous, perhaps impossible to travel in one lifetime. Then wham! The wrinkle. It always felt like a miracle to me.

Meg travels impossible distances across a wrinkle in space and time, to planets in a far distant part of the universe.

There are other wrinkles, other ways across impossible distances that we humans experience every day. They are our miracles and our mysteries and our moments of wonder.

For me, one such miracle is quadratic equations. Faced with a mathematical problem that has no intuitive answer, where you can't see the end, the way you can see two plus two (or even one planet divided by seven billion), the answer is an impossible distance away. Then someone teaches you how to do a quadratic equation. That is a miracle. There is the answer that you couldn't see without the wrinkle that the quadratic equation provides. I can't remember how to do quadratic equations any longer. But I do remember the feeling. It was wonder. A miracle.

You may have moments of clarity after sleeping on an impossible problem. In a moment of calm, with a little distance, the name you couldn't remember may come to

you ... sleep and calm and distance can produce miraculous results. What are your small miracles?

Back with *A Wrinkle in Time*: later on, at the book's climax, we witness another miracle. This one is not so small.

Remember that Meg has travelled across space via a wrinkle. For plot purposes, we need to know that Meg's little brother, Charles Wallace, has also travelled across the wrinkle. We also need to know that Meg hasn't been doing well at school and has been quite concerned about whether she might be stupid. She isn't, and neither is Charles Wallace. They are both bright.

The universe is beset by a tyrannical, dictatorial power. This power — called It — is crushing culture and freedom on planet after planet, in a systematic takeover. It will eventually have total control. Nothing can resist its progress. People subject to the power of It are little more than automatons, doing It's bidding.

Meg's little brother, Charles Wallace, is in It's power. He thinks everything is fine and he cannot be moved.

Meg has the impossible task — one small, human child — of rescuing Charles Wallace from It. She comes to It's presence and sees that It is a massive brain ... with an intelligence far beyond anything a human can imagine. Charles Wallace is a clever child but he is no match for It. It has the brain power to control the whole universe. It can do anything with that power. There is no one in the universe whose intelligence is a match for the vast, evil power of It. Meg is a clever child but she is no match for It.

Meg's miracle is that she figures out the one way to defeat the power of this massive brain. There is something that It cannot do.

"I love you, Charles Wallace," she says.

You can read the book to find out what happens next.

Or you can look a bit closer, on earth. In Auckland, Wellington, and other parts of Aotearoa.

Posie Parker came to our shores a couple of weeks ago to offer public policy advice and to push a public discourse towards denying not only the rights, but the very existence of trans people. She came from the UK, and is travelling the world to seek domination of her views. With the tools of social media — and mainstream media — and with allies from many hate groups, her power could be inexorable.

We didn't attempt to combat her hatred with hatred. We didn't meet her on her terms. We met her on ours. As she sought to vilify trans existence, we celebrated. As she tried to provoke hatred and fear and shame, we loved and we stood up. We flooded public places with love and pride.

We continued our project of building a beloved community. We promote love in community. We experience love in community.

Posie Parker gave up and went away. That is our miracle.

And so, Easter. Another miracle that is not so small.

In a Unitarian service it is uncontroversial to contend that a human did not come back to life on the third day after he had died and washed all our sins away. As a sometime ardent atheist I once thought that all you had to do was to disprove that literal story and so debunk Easter completely. Enjoy a couple of public holidays. Eat some chocolate. Be happy that retail workers have a couple of paid days' off.

When we atheists debunk Easter in this rather easy way, we miss out.

It is, I hope, uncontroversial to contend that Jesus lived, had followers and was executed.

Jesus lived in the time of Roman occupation, and he had followers. He was building a beloved community, based in love and peace.

He didn't have the military power to defeat the might of the colonising Roman occupation. The Romans sought victory through violence — peace through war: Pax Romana was not the peace that Jesus sought. Jesus and his followers couldn't defeat the Romans and achieve peace through war.

So they provided the example taken up by Meg in *A Wrinkle in Time*, and taken up by us when we build community with love rather than hatred and fear. Jesus welcomed the powerless, children, women, fishers. Jesus taught love.

This was too much of a threat for the occupying power, so they had him executed. But that wasn't the end of it.

Jesus' followers didn't always get it. And they certainly didn't get it in the three days after his death. They didn't experience the resurrection of Jesus' love on the first Easter Sunday. The history of how the gospels came into being is our evidence of this. The first account of the execution of Jesus, Paul's version, written 20 years after the fact, doesn't mention resurrection and doesn't mention a period of three days. The earliest version of the first gospel to be written, the gospel of Mark, doesn't mention a risen Christ, just an empty tomb. The three days — predicted in Jewish scripture — entered post-Jesus scripture much later, in revisions.

So what miracle of Easter was experienced by Jesus' followers?

I am now borrowing wholesale from [Clay's Easter sermon from five years ago](#):

“Based on my experience of how we humans process major shifts in our lives, I agree with those scholars who think that it took six months to a year for his key disciples to experience Easter. I also think the story of the road to Emmaus ... explains how they experienced Easter. You may remember that

two disciples not mentioned previously realised they had encountered the risen Christ after a meal where the stranger took, blessed, broke and shared bread with them. [Only after that moment did they recognise the stranger as Christ.] It was in loving fellowship around a meal that many might have experienced their first Easter, with the realisation that hate had not killed love. Not even Rome, with all its legions, could do it. The love and compassion they [had] experienced in the person of Jesus had not died. It lived on in them. That gave them hope and courage to go on. That is what resurrection meant for them.

“ ...

“Robert Morris speaks about the commonplace and frequently unnoticed ways that people rise above their loneliness and fear as ordinary resurrections. He points out that the origin of resurrection is the Greek word anastasis, which, he notes, means standing up again and, as he puts it unpretentiously: We all lie down. We all rise up. We do this every day.”

To experience resurrection, we need not wait for Easter, we need only arise, stand up again, and build a loving community.

So be it.

Meditation / Discussion Questions

- Please consider the question of miracles you have experienced.
- When have you experienced resurrection?