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 Arlington Street Church  
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## **Grateful for Small Miracles**

Chanukah, 5771

In this season of miracles, let's not let the big miracles blind us to the small miracles.

Here's what I mean: We call it the story of the burning bush; just five short verses at the top of the third chapter of Exodus:

Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro, his father in law ... and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of G\*d...

And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and behold! The bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.

And Moses said, "I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.

And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, G\*d called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, "Moses, Moses." And [Moses] said, "Here am I."

And [G\*d] said, "Draw not nigh hither: put ... thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."<sup>1</sup>

We call it the story of the burning bush, and yes, when G\*d puts in an appearance, it's a miracle! But let's not let the big miracle blind us to the small miracle. What else is there? *You are standing on holy ground.*

What if all ground – all earth – is holy? What if we choose to believe that we are always standing on holy ground? A small miracle.

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<sup>1</sup> Please see Exodus 3: 1-5

“There are only two ways to live your life.” This is Albert Einstein speaking. “One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.”

Here's a beautiful piece from columnist Tad Bartimus:

“Every morning, I wake up to a Chinese thrush singing like a coloratura soprano right outside my window... As I'm driving to town, John Lennon's *Imagine* comes on the car radio.... A baby ahead of me in the grocery store checkout line reaches over her mother's shoulder and touches my cheek, her tiny fingers ... as delicate as feathers.

“These moments inspire me,” she continues. “[Spontaneously, I] invite neighbors for Wednesday night pizza and don't care how clean the house is. I double the amount of money I'd normally enclose in a sympathy note. I impulsively buy a phone card for a friend's child who's a freshman at a faraway college. Instead of absentmindedly patting our ancient cat as I pass by, I sit down on the back steps and cradle him in my arms. His arthritic body is light as air, but his purr is stronger than ever. Mentally reviewing all we've been through together, I count his unwavering devotion as one of my greatest gifts.

“These daily miracles tether me,” Tad Bartimus concludes. “... It's from the reality of our [everyday] lives that we draw our strength to live.”<sup>2</sup>

Once we begin to look, we see small miracles everywhere.

Some of you will remember the tee-shirt promoting the “Ladies Sewing Circle and Terrorist Society.” Leave it to a group of Unitarian Universalist women to take the edge off the name, but still do the good work; members of our church in Traverse City, Michigan, call themselves “Unitarian Peacemaker Needleworkers Group.”

One day, they had the TV on as they worked (PBS, of course). A show came on about Torkin Wakefield's organization Bead for Life, “eradicating poverty one bead at a time.”<sup>3</sup> In war-torn, AIDS-ravaged Uganda, creating one-of-a-kind beads by hand-rolling colorful pages from recycled magazines is an alternative to earning a dollar a day in a rock quarry. The Unitarian Universalist women, says member Kathy Prentice, “saw it as a women-to-women and ... craftspeople-to-craftspeople connection.”

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2 From the work of Tad Bartimus, 11/14-20/01. Please see [eons.com/blogs/blog/TadBartimus](http://eons.com/blogs/blog/TadBartimus)

3 The beads were “discovered” by Torkin Wakefield, when she and her husband were working in Uganda for Doctors Without Borders. In 2004, she brought back beads for her friends in Boulder Colorado, and Bead for Life was born. Please see [beadforlife.org](http://beadforlife.org)

The Peacemaker Needleworkers began rolling beads, and finished them with a special eco-friendly varnish – of course – and then made them into earrings, necklaces, and bracelets, pricing most of them in the ten-to-twenty dollar range. At their very first sale – just a few hours on a Saturday – they raised five thousand dollars, enough to pay for two houses for Ugandan families left homeless by the war. What was trash became both beautiful and life-giving.

Now the Unitarian Peacemaker Needleworkers Group has twice the inventory they had at the first sale, and are planning to raise ten thousand dollars for more houses, as well as health care, education, and job training.<sup>4</sup> They are unstoppable.

Is Bead for Life a miracle? It is if your family is homeless, or if you missed years of school because you were fleeing the war, or if you need HIV medication you can't afford. It is if you're a little lonely, maybe, and looking for a circle of friends with whom to sit and do handwork, and talk and listen to a little PBS, and maybe even make a difference in the world ... a miracle as small as a bead and as big as saving a life.

One more story, this one from author Rus Cooper-Dowda.

At Chanukah a few years back, she writes, “my husband and I were invited to what we thought was a potluck dinner. The host family consisted of three adults [and] three kids...

“We brought a medium-sized jar of applesauce, a small container of sour cream, butter, and a single loaf of homemade bread. And twenty-three latkes. I know that we only brought twenty-three latkes because I counted them as I packed them up.

“When we got there, it turned out that our latkes, bread, and trimmings were the only food. Then the family invited the upstairs tenants. Then the tenants and their kids ... [came down with ] some friends of theirs who had just stopped by. At one point my spouse and I counted six or eight kids and about as many adults (since the kids kept moving all the time, our count was imprecise).

“[He and]... I took the tiniest portions of everything, and then watched as

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<sup>4</sup> Please see Brooks Vanderbush, *A Small Miracle*, at [morningstarpublishing.com/articles/2010/11/08/grand\\_traverse\\_insider/news/grand\\_traverse\\_area/doc4cd051711b89f228486031.txt?viewmode=fullstory](http://morningstarpublishing.com/articles/2010/11/08/grand_traverse_insider/news/grand_traverse_area/doc4cd051711b89f228486031.txt?viewmode=fullstory)

everyone dug in. Everybody ate at least two latkes. The kids ate mountains of applesauce. The adults slathered sour cream everywhere, even on the bread.... Our friends and neighbors ate until they had ... their fill.... [And] there [were] still leftover [latkes,] sour cream, [and] applesauce....

“We were filled with the miracle that took place. And we all parted satisfied.... And that's how we were reminded of wonders we cannot understand, but for which we should be grateful.”<sup>5</sup>

My spiritual companions, there are miracles enough – great and small – for all to be fed. A bird, music, a baby; a miracle is as small as a bead and as big as saving a life. Standing together on holy ground, let us find warmth from each other, nourish hope where reason fails, and choose to live as though everything is a miracle.

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5 Rus Cooper-Dowda, “Twenty-three Latkes,” from Mary Bernard and Kristie Anderson, *How We are Called*, pp. 67-68



The Unitarian Peacemaker Needleworkers Group: (clockwise from left) Sally Mitchell, Connie Hoffman, Joann Rosi, Arline Howe, Pinkie Hoffmann, Nan Worthington and organizer Kathy Prentice. Also helping, but not pictured were Jalene Moore and Nancy Doughty. Photo by Dave Lein.