

Season After Pentecost [Proper 5]
June 8/9, 2013
Haven Lutheran Church Hagerstown, Maryland
Readings: 1 Kings 17: 17-24; Psalm 30; Luke 7: 11-17

“Where’s My Miracle?”

Grace to you and peace from God — Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen

Who doesn't love a good miracle story? Water into wine. Two loaves and three fishes made into a tailgate party for 5,000. Lepers cured. Demons banished. Storms silenced. If you were raised on Bible stories, you probably have a favorite miracle.. I heard it said that the only “problem with miracles is that it is hard to witness them without wanting one of your own.”¹ Every one of us knows someone who is suffering. Our prayer list remains long with names of persons and families facing health concerns or other crisis in their lives. Not everyone who prays for a miracle gets what they pray for and that may take the shine off these stories of divine interventions and raise doubt.

On three different occasions Jesus raises someone from the dead — the daughter of Jairus, a synagogue leader; Lazarus, brother of Mary and Martha and the young man in today's gospel. In each case, Jesus does not seem to raise the dead in response to the dead or as a protest to death but in response to the broken hearts of mourners.² In the three years of his ministry many must have died, but Jesus only raised these three. What are we to make of this? The Lord urges us to pray, to lift our deepest needs and desires. We know miracles are possible. Yey today's gospel tells of a miracle performed without anyone asking, for a woman and son who may or may not have known about Jesus or the God of Israel. Are God's miracles random, occurring without any rational order or reasoning? Well, that idea would just drive us nuts! We believe the Lord who created a universe, bringing order to chaos would act more purposefully and thoughtful than that. Yet there is no formula we humans can discern or control.

Do miracles happen? Yes. Are we invited by God to pray for miracles? Yes. Will God hear us and care? Yes, without a doubt. Will we get what we prayed for? Jesus prayed the night before he died, “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me.” (Mark 14: 36) We may not get the miracle we prayed for but our prayers will be answered. The answer may be “yes,” “no,” “not now” or “not that way.” God hears. God hurts when we hurt. God loves. God answers prayer. That is the very real truth that seems to bring only limited comfort to those I visit who are about to become a widow or orphan, or who are experiencing earthquakes in their lives like the lose of a marriage, job, child or health. But it’s all I have to offer along with a deep faith that God **is** present, loving and caring.... and that whatever has or is about to happen is not the end of the story.

Dr. Al Lingren, professor at Garrett Theological Seminary, tells of taking his teenage son fishing years ago. As they were sitting in the boat and talking, his son suddenly asked, “Dad, what is the toughest thing God ever tried to do?” Totally caught off guard, Lingren didn’t know what to say. So he asked his son, “What do you think was the toughest thing God every tried to do?”

“Well,” the boy began, “Since taking science in school, I thought the creation of the world might be th hardest thing God ever tried to do. And in Sunday school when we got talking about some of the miracles, I thought the resurrection might be the toughest thing God ever tried to do. But, after thinking about it some more, I decided that the toughest thing God every had to do is get us to understand who he is and that he loves us.”³ To get us to understand who God is and that God loves us. It’s theme throughout the Bible and the life of Jesus. How do miracles fit in?

St. John in his gospel never uses the word miracle. When Jesus did something that seemed to defy nature and logic, he called them “signs.” This seems to me to be

something very important to add to our understanding of Jesus' miracles. Signs point to something other than themselves. A stop sign stands for a law we're expected to obey. Signs are to evoke reactions. We're not just to marvel at the changing colors of a traffic light. We're to stop or go. John helps us learn that "the main point of any miracles is not that something magical took place, but that the presence of God is revealed."⁴

Each of the miraculous signs Jesus performs in his ministry demonstrates not only the power of God, but the heart of God and the life God wants for us. God wants all of creation to know the kingdom of God — life that is not hampered by illness, poverty, fear, pain, sin or loss. The resurrection of Jesus reveals that God won't even let death have the final word. This is the God and the truth about our Lord that miracles and the resurrection point us toward understanding. We still may want to have miracles of our own but if it doesn't happen as we wish, we can still hold fast to our God who desperately wants us to know our Lord is good, merciful, more powerful than evil and death and loves us passionately. God's ways are mysterious to us but the power and love of God is loose and at work, miraculously revealed in extraordinary and ordinary ways.

Tony Campola, professor and minister, recounts a story about a time he preached in a church in Oregon. On impulse, as he ended the service offering to stay and pray with anyone seeking healing. He told them that he was not a TV miracle worker but that he would be willing to pray for them. Surprising, about thirty people stayed, with a variety of situations. Some asked for healing from physical problems but most had other requests. One man needed healing from an addiction to pornography. One woman wanted healing in her marriage. Another asked for healing from anger.

Four days later Tony got a phone call, and the woman at the other end said, "Tony, on Sunday you prayed for my husband. He had cancer." Tony replies, "You say

he had cancer. Do you mean that he is cancer-free now?" She said, "Well, he's dead now." Tony thought to himself – a lot of good I did!

But then she said, "You don't understand. When my husband and I walked into that church on Sunday, he was angry with God. He had cancer and he knew he was going to die soon, and he hated God for letting it happen. After all, he wanted to see his grandchildren grow up more than anything. At night he would lie in bed and curse God. It was horrible. And the angrier he got toward God, the meaner he was to everyone around him. It was unbearable."

"But then you laid hands on him Sunday morning and prayed for him. When he walked out of church I knew there was something different. I could feel it. He was a different person. The last four days of our lives have been the best days we've ever had together. We talked and laughed. We even sang hymns with each other. It was a glorious time." She paused and then added, "Tony, he wasn't cured, but he was healed."⁵ A miracle? Not the banishment of cancer as they might have wished yet undoubtably the true loving and life-giving presence of God was revealed.

Another of Tony's story comes from one of his friends who is a campus minister. One day a young woman came into his office, crying her eyes out. She was a lesbian and she had been outed. The word was getting around the campus and she knew it was only a matter of time before the word could get back to her father, a Baptist minister and a very stern man. She was sure that when her father found out, he would reject her. The pastor said to her, "Let me save you the trouble. Sit right there while I call your father."

He picked up the phone and dialed this Baptist minister who was the student's father. He said, "Your daughter is in my office. In her time here she has proven to be one of the loveliest, kindest, most gentle Christians on this campus. She lives out her faith." The father immediately responded with pride and said, "You're right. She's

wonderful. She's glorious!" He went on and on about how wonderful his daughter was. Then the campus minister took a deep breath and a risk as he said, "I'm glad we agree. In the next thirty seconds I'm going to find out whether you are worthy to be called her father." The good news is the father did exercised unconditional love and stood with his daughter.⁶ A miracle? The miraculous may not appear so dramatic or nature-defying. But whenever the power of God's life-giving grace is revealed, that IS a miracle.

The funeral procession was heading out of the gate of Naim. The widow thought her life and hope were to be buried with her son. But when it intersected with Jesus and he touched the bier and despair and death were sent packing. It's huge. The kind of miracle that makes you want to have one of your own. But miracles come in many varieties. Some may be a divine answer to prayer and others seem to come on their own. Some miracles may seem small and others spectacular. It **is** possible to miss one because you looking for something else. So think about this ----- whenever you sense that the goodness, the love, the presence of God has made its way some how into our broken lives and world, then you are witnessing the miraculous. That's your challenge this week. Look back over your life or look at each day with eyes open to the presence of God's grace that IS loose. Keep you eyes open. The miraculous presence of God IS there. Keep watch. Share the miraculous you see with others. And, like those witnesses in Naim, be ready to give God glory for the miracle in your midst. Amen.

Linda M Alessandri 6/8/13

ENDNOTES

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1. Barbara Brown Taylor, "The Problem with Miracles" in Bread of Angels Cambridge MA: Cowley Publications, 1997 p. 136.
 2. Nancy Rockwell, "What Happened at Naim" posted on her blog "The Bite in the Apple" June 2, 2012
 3. Robert Allen, "God Moves in Mysterious Ways" Into the Whirlwind C.S.S. Publishing Company, 1991 as posted on www.esermons.com
 4. Robert Allen, "God Moves in Mysterious Ways" Into the Whirlwind C.S.S. Publishing Company, 1991 as posted on www.esermons.com
 5. Tony Campola, Let Me Tell You a Story New York: Thomas Nelson, 2000, pp. 34-36 as quoted by Bill Bouknight in his sermon, "Healing by the Great Physician" Collected Sermons Christian Globe Networks,

Inc. 2006, 0-0000-3434

6. Tony Campola, "Becoming What God Intended You to Be" program #4715 first broadcast January 24, 2004 as posted on www.csec.org/csec/sermon/campolo_4715.htm