

Sermon for McCabe  
June 8-9, 2013

Our scriptures today follow the common lectionary, a three year discipline as found in the Methodist Book of Worship. The scriptures, as read for today, all involve miracles. Two are miracles carried out by the prophet Elijah, who speaks to the people on behalf of God. The third miracle is performed by Jesus himself.

The Bible is replete with miracles. For instance, from Mark 1 to Mark 10, we find at least a dozen miracles Jesus performed during part of his earthly ministry.

We can't read Genesis without realizing that WE, ourselves, are miracles. Think about it: you are simply one of a kind created by the spirit of God, who continues to live in believers, and does miracles in our lives on a daily basis. The problem, my friends, is that we are not aware of what God does for us on a daily basis.

Are we not humbled by the fact we get up in the morning and can carry on our lives? We need to be, even if we don't really realize what we have and are capable of. Like Elijah, simply by prayer, we can see the miraculous in our lives. But we need to come to God and see things other worldly.

In his book, When Bad Things Happen to Good People, Rabbi Harold Kushner tells of the youngster who came home from Sunday School after having been taught the Biblical

story of Moses and the Israelites crossing the Red Sea. The boy's mother asked him what he had learned in class and he told her: "The Israelites got out of Egypt, but Pharaoh and his army chased after them. They got to the Red Sea and they couldn't cross it. The Egyptian army was getting closer. So Moses got on his walkie-talkie, the Israel Air Force bombed the Egyptians, and the Israeli Navy built a pontoon bridge so the people could cross."

The mother was shocked. "Is that the way they taught you the story?"

"Well, no," the boy admitted, but if I told you the way they told it to us, you'd never believe it."

Rabbi Kushner goes on to say the point of stories, such as the Red Sea crossing, was to prove that God cared about us so much He was willing to suspend the laws of nature to support and protect those He favored.

But like the boy in the Sunday School story, we are skeptical. ??If any thing, we find proof of God precisely in the fact laws of nature do not change.??

Kushner continues by saying: "our human bodies are miracles, not because they defy laws of nature, but precisely because they obey them. Our digestive systems extract nutrients from food. Our skins help to regulate temperature by perspiring. The pupils of our eyes expand and contract in response to light. Even when we get sick, our bodies have built in defense mechanisms to fight the

illness. All these wonderful things happen, usually without our being aware of them in accordance with the precise laws of nature. That, not the legendary splitting of the Red Sea, is the real miracle."

The definition of miracle according to Webster is: 1. an extraordinary event manifesting divine intervention in human affairs; 2. an extremely outstanding or unusual event, thing, or accomplishment; 3. Christian Science: a divinely natural phenomenon experienced humanly as the fulfillment of spiritual law.

In the book, *The Miracles of Jesus: Meditations and Prayers for Lent*, by Wessel Bentley, we find for day two the title, "Jesus who goes home with you." It is based on verses from Mark 1:29-31, which read as follows: "Jesus and his disciples, including James and John, left the synagogue and went straight to the home of Simon and Andrew. Simon's mother-in-law was sick in bed with a fever, and as soon as Jesus arrived he was told about her. He went to her, took her by the hand, and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them."

Once again we see Jesus Performing a miracle in the lives of everyday people. But as Bentley states, "They left the synagogue."

Depending on how we look at this we may simply decide that Jesus is concluding his day by going to someone's home for the evening.

Nowadays, with the way we live with our tight schedules and everything having it's time and place, do we have a time and place for Jesus? Do we simply think he will wait for us in church until we return next Sunday? Can we fit Him in between this meeting (church service??) and the next one?

My friends, I feel we need to take Jesus home with us, not physically as James and John did, but in our hearts and minds, through prayer and our actions. After all, He is with us if we just pay attention more frequently. And He does perform miracles in our lives on a daily basis, as Rabbi Kushner noted in his book.

Working for the North Dakota Department of Transportation for 12 years was a unique challenge, to say the least. Often in the winter, it was not unusual to plow snow for 10 to 14 hours a day. Often, this would go on for weeks on end, without a day off. I look back and wonder how I did this. But I realize now that God was there with me and was doing some more of his miraculous work. I surely could not have done it all myself. Much the same could be said for our summer work with the NDDOT: standing on hot pavement, which frequently registered in the 100 degree range, for ten hours a day while traffic rushed by. Driving truck and putting on 500 to 700 miles a day going to and from the paver while paving patches on the highway. Once again I look back in wonder and

amazement. Just how could I do all this? I know for a fact that I had help of the heavenly kind. This I know was another of Jesus' miraculous works in my life, allowing me to live on and do his bidding.

I am sure we all have had things like this happen in our lives often on a daily basis. Is it not wonderful to know that God loves us enough to see us through our everyday toils and tribulations?

When working for NDDOT, I worked with people who used cell phones rather extensively. One person in particular was very memorable and still stands out in my mind. His cell phone ring was, "Hey, God here, pick up the phone, let's chat a while." I vividly remember the first time I heard this. I laughed heartily as I heard it as I thought it was unique and catchy. Looking back, it still is unique and catchy, but I am not sure it is a laughing matter - to talk to God, that is. I am uncertain why this individual had this message for a cell phone ring and I am also uncertain if he is a Christian.

The point here, my friends, is that maybe we should talk to God more often than we do, or listen when He talks to us. We find in Hebrews 4:7, "If you hear God's voice today, do not be stubborn." I hear God at times telling me what to do. That is, encouraging me to do what He wants me to do. It gives me the courage to do what God desires of me.

Recently, I watched the movie, The Shawshank Redemption. This was the second time I have seen it, but this time I was seeing it through different eyes. The movie is a story about a banker, Andy Dufresne, who goes to prison for killing his wife and her lover, although he claims to be innocent just as every other inmate in Shawshank prison does. But Andy actually **is** innocent. Andy goes on to gain the confidence of the warden, because of his financial background, and becomes the warden's bookkeeper and investment advisor using money which the warden is scamming from various prison programs. Banker Andy is clever enough to scam the scammer: he keeps two sets of books and when he escapes from prison he takes the money and exposes the warden.

While still in prison, the banker is befriended by another 'lifer' inmate, Red. Red was the man in prison who could get you anything you wanted from the outside, from cigarettes to a tiny rock pick. Red finally gets paroled after Andy's escape. He goes to work in a grocery store on a work release program to fulfill his parole obligations. After his forty years in prison, Red finds his freedom unnerving and briefly considers suicide. Then he remembers Andy and his promise of a better life if Red joins him in Mexico. Andy had written, "I could use a good man to help me get my project on wheels. I'll keep an eye out for you and the chess board ready. Remember,

Red, hope is a good thing; maybe the best of things and no good thing ever dies. I will be hoping that this letter finds you and you well."

Hope, by definition, is expectation of fulfillment or success, or to desire with expectation of obtainment.

I can see a Christ figure in Andy. Innocent, but betrayed, he is imprisoned. He is badly abused and beaten, but the hope within him never dies. After many years, he makes his escape, bringing the downfall of the evil warden. And he offers hope to Red, who, like us, needs forgiveness.

Isn't that what we are promised by the resurrection of our saviour Jesus Christ? By Christ's dying to cleanse us of our sins, He fulfilled the hope that we can be free and be by his side in heaven.

1 Peter 1:3-7 states: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade - kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith - of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though

refined by fire - may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."

In the end of The Shawshank Redemption, Red violates his parole and goes to be with his friend Andy, the banker. On his way there he says to himself, "I find I am so excited I can barely sit still or hold a thought in my head. I think it's the excitement only a free man can feel. A free man at the start of a long journey whose conclusion is uncertain. I hope I can make it across the border. I hope to see my friend and shake his hand. I hope the pacific is a blue as it has been in my dreams. I hope."

This, my friends, I feel is how we should be...so excited and filled with hope about the journey we are going on as we go through our lives committed to Jesus Christ and following his teachings. Filled with the hope that we ARE saved and will live a free life in the end. Aware that WE are a miracle.

In Luke 11: 14-17, we find Jesus performing the miracle of the mute man. He was changed in an instant and we never hear of him again. The crowds, ever present where Jesus went, were amazed, but were also not sure who Jesus was. Some felt he was from Beelzebub, the chief of demons. Is this just another manifestation of the human spirit...to reject the miraculous works of Jesus? Is this not the same as what can occur in a church? An argument



over how things should be arranged within the church? An argument over the hymns we sing at our services? Does the preacher talk too long? On and on it can go, all the while we are missing the wonderful works taking place in front of us.

My friends, as you know we here at McCabe are undergoing changes in our staff. The biggest challenge is the impending loss of our associate pastor Ray Baker. This leaves Rick Fossum, our head pastor, with an heavy workload. But, believing in miracles, I know that we will get through this in good order and will be better for it. That's the way it is supposed to work, so that we learn and grow from our struggles. But it will take the miracle of a lot of us stepping out of our comfort zones, stepping up to the plate and assisting Rick to make McCabe function, grow and change. Occasionally it takes a miracle to perform a miracle.

We find in Mark 6:48-51 the familiar story of Jesus calming the storm. Jesus saw that His disciples were straining at the oars, because they were rowing against the wind; so sometime between three and six o'clock in the morning, Jesus came to them, walking on the water. He was going to pass them by, but they saw him walking on the water. They were terrified when they saw him. "It's a ghost" they thought, and screamed. Jesus spoke to them at once, "Courage," he said. "It is I. Don't be afraid!"

Then he got into the boat with them and the wind died down. The disciples were completely amazed."

Let me issue a challenge to you: let's prepare ourselves, just like the disciples, to be "completely amazed." In prayer, let's trust God to keep McCabe from sinking in a storm of change. Instead of ruffling feathers -- our own and others' -- let's keep a positive attitude and work together to make things what they should be. You have heard the old line, "If you aren't part of the solution, you might be part of the problem." Let's determine to be part of the solution. Louise and I have often commented on the dedicated workers here at McCabe. While we might expect to get hit with some hard waves in the months ahead, we can also expect God to walk with us through each situation. Just as with the disciples, Jesus is there in the storm, but He would have passed them if they had not called out to Him. When we feel panicked about the future, we need to pray. Pray and trust. Remember Jesus' words: **"Courage. It is I. Don't be afraid."**

God bless you.