

“We Need A Miracle NOW!”
+ 2nd Sunday after the Epiphany, Year C +
John 2:1-11
January 17, 2010

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! AMEN The text for this morning’s message is the Gospel lesson for this day.

“We need a miracle, NOW, Son!” you can almost hear Mary saying to her newly minted son, the Rabbi, with his cadre of disciples, all of whom have shown up at what we can only assume was a family wedding feast at Cana – some four miles from Nazareth up north in Galilee on the Ptolemias-Taricheae road. For whatever reasons things have gone sadly awry at this nuptial gathering and a divine intervention is requested. “We need a miracle, NOW, Son!”

An earnest request for help from the only source you know with miracles to give is not unlike the thoughts of many in the world this past week with the devastating news from Haiti. I had a member ask me, “If God knows everything and can stop anything why did God let this happen?” Having this text rattling in my head (as texts will do when you are going to be preaching on them) I wondered how this sweet elderly lady would take it if I gave her the answer Mary – recently revered in our Advent/Christmas observations and eternally hailed as The Mother of Our Lord/Queen of Heaven – had received from her son, “Woman, what is it to you?”

How confused she must have been. Just 3 days before at His baptism the heavens had opened and the Spirit descended in the form of a dove as the voice of the Father said, “This is my Son, the beloved, in whom I am well pleased.” Everyone at the wedding knew about it. Signs and wonders were certain to follow the revealing of God’s beloved – the Messiah. “Why not now?” seems to be Mary’s question – or was she just asking her son to handle a sticky situation that had resulted from some bad planning by the bride’s family?

Certainly she expected Jesus to do SOMETHING as she told the servants to listen to Him and follow His instructions. And handle the situation He did. The wine flowed – a hundred gallons or more of the very best, most excellent wine. What a gracious gift to the bride and groom who would have all the excess for their personal use – and the feast continued.

Thus began the signs and wonders that proclaimed to all who heard them that Jesus, the Son of God – the son of Mary – the Messiah, had come! Signs and wonders – miracles – they seemed to flow so freely in the days of Jesus and in the early church. “We need a miracle NOW!” was followed by an immediate response. We just heard from the Apostle Paul speaking to the Corinthians in our Epistle lesson about all sorts of gifts from the Spirit: wisdom, knowledge, exceptional faith, healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, discernment of spirits, speaking in ecstatic tongues and the interpretation of those tongues and languages. There you have your “grab-bag” of signs and wonders that the early church seemingly could fetch a miracle from whenever one was needed as they made Christianity visible in the pagan world – revealing to countless thousands the salvation they could receive as the greatest gift from God through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Or so a simple reading of Spiritual gifts and the miracles of Jesus might lead you to believe – Name it and Claim it – Believe and Receive! In the last decades national and international ministries have begun with just those kinds of teachings – all using texts of scripture as a basis. Throughout the history of the church there have been times when it seems the gifts of the Holy Spirit have been written off to a distant time and place and others when they have been required/demanded as an assurance for salvation. At the time of Martin Luther he swore there was a group of Christians who had “swallowed the Holy Spirit feathers and all.”

With a devastating disaster all over the news and long-term unemployment and downward lifestyle adjustments affecting vast numbers in our country, friends and relatives sick or dying, loneliness, depression, family strife, debilitating limitations caused by aging – “We need a miracle, NOW – where IS MY miracle?” is the cry of many hearts here today. A fair and timely question whenever it has been asked.

It leads us back to the question of one of our members I mentioned earlier about why God seems to be doing nothing when certainly God could –and right back to Mary in our text who is rather brusquely brushed aside! It is not particularly comforting to hear “God’s time is God’s time” when we want that time to be NOW. It does not always make us feel better to believe and know that God acts with a wisdom beyond our understanding – sometimes through miraculous intervention, signs and miracles and sometimes not. It seems callous when we are “out-in-the cold” to trust that God is always at work through God’s people the church – through the Word active and alive in the people who have been claimed by faith, washed in the waters, strengthened in God’s meal and upheld and empowered by the Spirit. When there is no one beside you immediately with an answer to your problem it doesn’t seem as though God’s people are really “coming through.”

Immediate perspective is often skewed. In perspective and in the context of time the early church and the church throughout the ages has been marked by incredible acts of love – generous sharing, self-sacrifice – children taken in who were left to die, widows – the homeless and discarded given a place to dwell, dignity and respect and unexpected miracles. As a young man I read of an orphanage in England in the 19th century that had run out of food and funds to operate – in desperation the clergyman who ran it knelt in prayer unsure where the food for the next meals would come from. As he prayed and even before he’d fallen to his knees God was at work as throughout the countryside farmers had loaded wagons with food to share and they arrived at dawn with more than enough just when it was needed – when the time was right. No instant message was sent out via computer or cell phone – the Spirit spoke to hearts that were listening, to people ready to hear and act on God’s command.

There are countless stories like that today – of people saved in the wreckage in Haiti, orphans who will arrive at the homes that have been prepared for them in other countries – and there are many other situations and stories to react to. I spoke to a crying woman whose friend had arrived as part of a group of nurses on their annual medical mission trip to Haiti – they got there just an hour before the quake. She died in a hospital where she was starting her tour of duty. A Lutheran pastor’s son from Duluth was killed in an orphanage where he had gone as a volunteer. How tragic – how terrible! But not unrelated to our text and the reality of Jesus in His time here on earth. I can say with great certainty, I believe, that while Jesus turned water

into wine in Cana that day long ago there were people in the community who went unhealed – their infirmities untouched while the wedding feast went on in awe and praise at the wonder of what God had done.

God's entry into time and space to save us from our sin did not eliminate the results of sin in our world – though Jesus conquered sin and death. Earthquakes and disasters of all sorts, wars and rumors of wars – all these things will continue until the end of time – until the beginning of the wedding feast that will not end – until heaven. But in the meantime we have not been left bereft – we have not been left without work to accomplish – the love, the Good News to share in word and in deed. You and I can make a difference in the lives of those affected in Haiti – we will be taking collections for that purpose in the weeks to come. We have made a difference and will continue to make a difference in our community right here in St. Paul as we gather around Word and Sacrament, as our sisters and brothers in the Mykane Jesus come together in this place to worship and praise, as lives are touched through the Lutheran Counseling Center that resides in this building, the 75-100 young people who come for Young Life meetings here in our building, the Scouts – so many lives being touched by the love of God shown to us in Jesus Christ with more to come!

As we follow the commands of Jesus – listen to what we have been told to do, how we have been instructed to act miracles can and will happen. I would be remiss on this MLK weekend not to remark on how Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. saw the need for a miracle, prepared his people to do what they could in readiness for the events to follow. Harkening to the cry of Mahatma Ghandi for change through non-violent protest our whole nation was changed. Yes there was not an absence of violence – we live in a messy sinful world, but change occurred – a nation, a people were changed in their attitudes and actions led by an imperfect human being – as imperfect but made whole by the righteousness earned by the sinless Son of God, Jesus Christ, as you and I have been.

In the face of all that surrounds us – all the challenges and changes – all the things that threaten our celebrations or the struggles in our daily life may we turn with faith to Jesus, follow His command to “love one another” that our joy, our determination to make a difference in His name as His gifts and power is shown through us by His Spirit might be made known – so others may come to Jesus and live eternally!

AMEN

Now may God's Spirit grant us peace and transform us by love to show forth God's glory in our lives and in our deeds that God's gladness and salvation might be proclaimed until we feast with the Bridegroom, Jesus, in heaven. AMEN