

Sermon

Quinquagesima, 2011

St. Luke's Anglican Church, Amherst, NH

Let us pray: Almighty and everlasting God, who dost govern all things in heaven and earth; Mercifully hear the supplications of thy people, and grant us thy peace all the days of our life; through Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen.

Sometimes, we pray for miracles. Sometimes, it seems, miracles are the only hope, the last possible chance for a hopeless cause. At such times, and for such hopeless people, miracles seem very remote. And they usually are.

Later today, when I head for home, I will gather up the Sunday newspaper, read a bit of it, walk the dog and share dinner with my wife. But there is one thing I will not do on this particular Sunday, the Sunday we fondly call Quinquagesima. I will not turn on the television. No, it is not because I am getting an early start on Lenten privations. It is not my annual custom to forego the tv on Quinquagesima. No, the television will remain off because there is no football game. Not one. In the interest of full disclosure, I confess to enjoying the game, as dangerous to the players as it can sometimes be. I confess to rooting loudly for a particular football team. I also confess that I had, at one time, a football career. Sadly, it was brutally short. I remember that day very well. My high school football coach assessed all the new recruits for the squad. He had a keen eye for talent and usually put together a winning team. I wondered how he would place me. Yes, I had dreams of being the star quarterback. But running back would also be good. Hey, I'd even settle for tackle or safety. Well, he approached me, took me aside,

assessed my skills and told me that I certainly had gifts. He encouraged me to take up the tuba.

His gifts of discernment were certainly excellent; I did take up the tuba and had a marvelous time with that curious instrument.

But I am still very fond of football. The exciting games are the close ones. Sometimes, those very close games come down to the final play. Occasionally, the outcome of these games becomes perfectly clear as the seconds tick away. We can almost hear the players say to themselves: “only a miracle can save us now.” Only a miracle. And sometimes, in an act of sheer desperation, the quarterback will throw a pass called the “Hail Mary.” Every player will rush downfield. They will stretch their arms toward heaven and hope and pray that the football falls into their hands. It rarely does. The Hail Mary Pass is an act of desperation, a final attempt to save the day, to engineer a miracle. And when it fails, it just proves the obvious: miracles are very hard to come by. Miracles almost never happen. We all know this.

And we are very wrong. Miracles do happen. They can happen all the time. Miracles are available to us all. We just need one thing. And we all know what it is we need. It is Jesus.

St Luke's gospel makes this very clear. What does the gospel reading for Quinquagesima tell us? There are actually two parts to this gospel reading. The first part tells us of Jesus relating the passion narratives to his apostles. He tells them precisely what will happen to

him; he will be delivered to the Gentiles, he will be mocked, spit on, put to death and rise again. He tells them this in very concrete language. But they don't understand what he has told them. They don't get it. They can't understand it. No miracle here.

There was a true miracle on that very day in Jericho. We have heard the reading from St. Luke just a few moments ago. We have heard about a blind beggar who persistently and against all efforts to keep him quiet called upon Jesus to heal him; to restore his sight. He called out: "Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me." And Jesus asks him what it is he wants. Simply, he says: "Lord, that I may receive my sight." Without hesitation, the man's wish is granted. The miracle on that day tells us more than that a poor man's eyesight was returned to him. It has more to do with the wonder of that impossible action. It tells more about God than we could ever know. But this we do know; when God is present, when God is called on to be present with us, miracles do happen.

We need a miracle here at St. Luke's. And I know it will happen. It will happen when we call out to God in the fullness of our hearts and minds to heal us of our blindness. Because we are all blind. And because we all need the healing love that only God in Jesus Christ can provide.

The restoring of eyesight is a wonderful and powerful thing; it is a miracle, certainly. But the greater miracle comes when the eyes of our hearts are opened to the presence of Jesus in our lives. That is the true miracle that we should all look for. That is the true miracle

that we all should pray for; the gift of sight that we may see the love of God's presence here in the midst of our church.

Today, we mark an important transition in the life of St. Luke's. Lent will be here in three days. Lent is a time of prayer and preparation.

We also will have a transition of clergy. Father Christian has been here for fifteen months. He has served this parish well. And we thank him for his true and faithful service. God has called him to this place and he has responded with dedication and love. Today, we welcome Father Webb to this place and pray that he will assist this parish over the next year as it grows to maturity in the faith of Jesus Christ. What we are witnessing today is the godly transition of clergy, a healthy pattern that I pray will be repeated into the future. It is as Jesus would have it. Just as we are bound together in the love of God, so should we lovingly welcome all who serve God in His holy church.

Two thousand years ago, in a city called Jericho, a blind beggar gained his sight. But who on that day also learned to see – maybe for the first time. There were those who followed Jesus who also had their eyes opened. They were opened to the love of God whose infinite power seeks always to let us know that He will be with us if we but know his presence and call upon him to heal us.

Have you ever studied the miracles that appear in the gospels? Take a look at them. There is something very similar about them all.

Jesus is there. Miracles only seem remote and impossible when we forget Jesus. But when we bring Jesus close to us, when we look to Jesus for guidance, when we know in the fulness of our being that this is His church and He wants only the best for it – then miracles do indeed happen.

A Hail Mary pass is really quite a silly thing, after all. It can be dramatic. It can be fun. Once in awhile it works. But mostly it doesn't. And even if it does, it is not a true miracle. True miracles happen when Jesus is there. They happen on the streets of ancient Jericho. They happen here. When we embrace Jesus. And when we embrace each other in the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost.

Let us pray: Almighty and everlasting God, who hatest nothing that thou hast made, and dost forgive the sins of all those who are penitent; Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our wretchedness, may obtain of thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.