

SUNDAY, May 12, 2024 "Miracle of Life"

I John 5: 9-13 John 15:9-17

It's a miracle! Throughout this season of Easter we have been learning about miracles and have defined such as a surprising and welcome event that is not explicable by natural or scientific laws and is therefore considered to be the work of a divine agency. "Another definition is that it is an extraordinary event taken as a sign of the supernatural power of God. We have reflected on the miracles of feeding the 5000 men + women and children, healing the man lowered from the roof, the man born blind and Doubting Thomas seeing Jesus with faith. IT has been seven weeks since we also shouted and shared Hallelujahs and rejoiced that Christ is risen from the dead—and this is the miracle of life in Christ.

But what does this mean for us as we move into the season of spring which calls us to plant seeds, irrigate, fertilize and nurture the seeds. We also hope that there is not too much rain, too much heat with everything put into balance so that the crop or garden is the best one yet! In many ways are praying for miracles—because no matter what we do—we cannot make/force/ entice a seed to grow and reproduce itself. It is not in our abilities as human beings. And for this we must give thanks for the miracle of life.

God in wisdom created all that there is and as our Creed states and 'is creating'. The world renews itself which each seed, each egg, or offspring of animals, or babies which are born. And this is what gives us hope. Hope when there seems to be no hope or a fading sense in this world. But where do we find hope? We need to hear the stories of people who have received God's gifts of mercy, come to know Jesus as Master and Saviour and who know in their hearts that they will live eternally with God. This is what faith in God is all about. And this is the purpose of our church—to make disciples of faith in Jesus. But we are also called to tell others our stories. In First John 5 we read, 'Those who believe in the Son of God have the testimony in their hearts. This testimony, life experience or story is having the belief that God gave us Jesus in order that we will receive the gift of eternal life. And while we live here on earth, we will experience the joy of knowing Jesus and this joy will be complete! This is according to John's gospel but to truly know joy, there are conditions;

Father loves Jesus-> Jesus loves us therefore abide in Jesus' love. If one keeps commandments, abide in Jesus' love → Jesus abides in God's love. Do this and have complete joy. It seems easy enough- but it is not always easy in everyday life. This my commandment—to love one another as Jesus has loved us. And how much does Jesus love us? Enough to open his arms and die on the cross; to die for us and take all our wrongdoings upon him so that we

are forgiven. This is the message of Easter—which never ends—but continues always in our hearts.

But we need to be clear—God Jesus and Spirit are one this what we call the trinity- not 3 separate gods but God in three persons. Each known by themselves yet as a whole is God – creator, redeemer and sustainer or Father, son and Spirit. And it is this Trinitarian understanding of God that leads us to know Jesus the Son as more than human. But Jesus came so that people would listen to him and then seek to follow him. Jesus does not want passive followers- but people committed to him and his church- the place where learn, share and grow in understanding of God, His Son and the Spirit which guides us always.

As Christians we believe that we experience God in different ways- different times, circumstances and even in different celebrations of both life and death. But we must remember that we are not alone- God is with us and whether we find ourselves drawn to the beauty and wonder of God's creation; or focus on Jesus' miracles or experience the Spirit calling us to do something random or with intensity, God is all of these and to know God is to know the Son and the Spirit which is with us now.

A wealthy man and his son loved to collect rare works of art. They had everything in their collection, from Picasso to Raphael. They would often sit together and admire the paintings. Then a war broke out, and the son went away to fight. He was very courageous and died in battle while rescuing another soldier. The father was notified and grieved deeply for his only son. A few months later there was a knock at the door and a young man stood there with a large package in his hands. "Sir, you don't know me," he said, "but I am the soldier your son died to save. He saved many lives that day, and he was carrying me to safety when a bullet struck him in the heart and he died instantly."

The young man held out his package. "I know this isn't much," he said, "but your son often talked about you and your love for art. "I'm not a great artist, but I think your son would have wanted you to have this." The father opened the package to find a portrait of his son, painted by the young man. He stared in awe at the way the soldier had captured the personality of his son in the painting, especially his eyes, until his own eyes welled up with tears. He thanked the young man and offered to pay him for the picture.

"Oh, no sir, I could never repay what your son did for me. It's a gift," said the young man.

The father hung the portrait over his fireplace, and every time visitors came to his home he took them to see the portrait of his son before he showed them any of the other great works he had collected.

Not too long afterwards, the man died and a great auction of his paintings was organised. Many influential people gathered, excited over seeing the great paintings and having an opportunity to obtain one for their own collection.

On the platform sat the painting of the son, and the auctioneer pounded his gavel. "We will start the bidding with this picture of the son. What am I bid for this picture?" There was a long silence. Finally a voice came from the back of the room: "We want to see the famous paintings. Skip this one."

But the auctioneer persisted: "Who will bid for this painting? Who will start the bidding? £100, £50?" Another voice shouted angrily: "We didn't come to see this painting. We came to see the Van Goghs, the Rembrandts. Get on with the real paintings!"

But still the auctioneer continued. "Who'll take the son?"

Finally, a voice came from the very back of the room. It was the long-time gardener of the man and his son. "I'll give £10 for the painting." Being a poor man, it was all he could afford. "We have £10, who will bid £20?"

"Give it to him for £10 and let's move on to the Masters!" The crowd was becoming angry. They didn't want the picture of the son. They wanted the more worthy investments for their collections. The auctioneer pounded the gavel. "Going once, twice, SOLD for £10!"

A man sitting on the second row shouted. "Now let's get on with the collection!"

The auctioneer laid down his gavel. "I'm sorry, he said, "but the auction is over."

"But what about the famous paintings?" demanded the crowd.

"I am sorry," the auctioneer explained. "When I was called to conduct this auction, I was told of a secret stipulation in the will. I was not allowed to reveal that stipulation until this moment. Only the painting of the son would be auctioned. Whoever bought that painting would inherit the entire estate, including the other paintings. The man who took the son gets everything!"

And the gospel message is similar: Who will take the Son? Whoever takes Jesus the Son gets everything! Joy that is complete, love that is fulfilled in others and in you, hope that

goes beyond this life, and peace that comes when one is in need and searching. This is the miracle of life—in Christ.

Let us pray.

Holy God as we heard the stories of miracles we give thanks for Jesus who lived and died and rose again to new life. We thank or people who longer ago trusted Jesus and believed what they experienced and saw. Help us to see again that these miracles do exist. Help us to take the Son, Your son so that our lives may be full. So that our joy may be full. Hear us O God as we pray to you. SILENCE. Amen.