

SERMON
“The Miracle of It”
Reformation Sunday
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Job 42: 1-6, 10-17

Mark 10: 46-52

They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, **“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”** Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, **“Son of David, have mercy on me!”** Jesus stood still and said, “Call him here.” And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart; get up, he is calling you.” So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said to him, “My teacher, let me see again.” Jesus said to him, “Go, your faith has made you well. Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

SERMON

No longer can I read today's scripture passage without thinking of The Rev. Dr. James Forbes standing in the middle of Riverside Church's fellowship hall in New York City shouting, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Dr. Forbes explained that the minute blind Bartimaeus son of Timaeus heard that Jesus was passing his way he **expected a miracle**. So he shouted, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." Many tried to silence him, but he could not be silenced. He just shouted more loudly. For he knew without a doubt this was his chance to catch a miracle.

The theme of miracles had been playing around in my head all week. I had taken a group of University of Oklahoma students on a pilgrimage to New York City. Pilgrimages are contemplative journeys. Throughout a pilgrimage, people pray and meditate to remain open to the Spirit wishing to address them. Pilgrims also visit sites considered sacred. Places where God has been felt most strongly by many people for many years. The reason pilgrims do this is to find, to quest for the new thing God is trying to bring forth in them. A pilgrim is one who seeks holy ground to obtain spiritual renewal and growth. We go on pilgrimages to be confronted by changes necessary for us to be transformed more and more, everyday and in every way, into the likeness of Christ. On a pilgrimage time is set aside to take St. Paul's advice in 2 Corinthians seriously—"to be transformed from one degree of glory to another." (2 Cor. 3:18)

The glory that caught my attention that spring of 2002 was that of miracles. It was the spring following 9/11. A stop on our pilgrimage was St. Paul's Chapel, an Episcopal church down on Church Street. This definitely was a place where God had been felt strongly for many years. It dates back to George Washington's Inauguration in 1789. There we volunteered with numerous others to offer support for those working in the "pit" (the name the fire fighters and

police officers gave ground zero). At this point, they were still recovering body parts so loved ones could have closure. Many of the fire fighters and police officers were also searching for co-workers and friends not yet found. On the wall of St. Paul's Chapel in the midst of all the sadness and grief, hung posters that talked of "The Miracle on Church St." "Miracles," I thought, "How can we think of 9/11 as a miracle?". Of course the miracle being referred to was the fact that this tiny, ancient church that set almost in the back yard of the World Trade Towers had survived without a scratch. Plus, **it emerged out of the ashes to offer an extraordinary eight-month ministry of hope and healing.**

From that point forward, miracle themes popped up everywhere we went in Manhattan. Right up until the last night we were in the city. On that evening we journeyed up to the far north of Manhattan to Riverside Church to hear The Rev. Dr. James Forbes preach. And what was the story from scripture on which he chose to preach but the **miracle** of Bartimaeus son of Timaeus.

After Dr. Forbes had explained how Bartimaeus expected a miracle, and how he was not going to let the obstacle of a people trying to silence him stand in his way, Forbes began to walk around the room. He walked right up to people and asked, "What's the miracle you're looking for in your life." Once they told him, he said, "Then take heart, raise your voice for Jesus is passing our way this day." And Forbes would get the individual to shout with him, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Then Forbes would ask, "What are the forces at work trying to silence you, what are the obstacles your faith needs to overcome? Then shout it again my friend, even louder. Do not let anyone hush you up when you believe a miracle is headed your way." On that note, pastor and parishioner shouted at the top of their lungs, "Son of David, have mercy on me."

After doing this with a few individuals, Forbes eventually turned to all of us asking, “What’s the miracle you’re looking for in your lives.” Some shouted theirs out together. I just spoke it silently to myself. But when he said, “Take heart, rise up, and let your voice be heard for Jesus is passing our way this day.” I jumped to my feet and shouted loudly right along with over 300 hundred souls including my students, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Then Forbes asked, “What are the forces at work trying to silence you, what are obstacles your faith needs to overcome? Then shout it again my friend, even louder. Do not let anyone hush you up when you believe a miracle is headed your way.” The room vibrated with, “Son of David, have mercy on me.” Never before had I believed in miracles as strongly as I did that evening. The next day my miracle came true. I cannot tell you what it was...for it is way too personal.

As Reformation approached this year I got to thinking about miracles again. The sermon Dr. Steve Dodge preached on “Healing the Schism between Science and Religion” got me to thinking about the miracle of things lining up just right. Steve talked about the many forces that had to come together in exactly the right space and order for the miracle of creation to have happened. From there my mind jumped to how all the right events took place to bring all of us together.

On this Reformation Sunday let’s consider all the forces at work that brought all of us together this day. Our ancestors were once scattered all over this earth—Germany, Switzerland, Romania, Hungary, Bohemia, England, France, and I’m certain numerous other places I do not know about. Carolyn Wolfe’s great grandfather, Sebastian Dingeldein, was about as German as you could get. He was of Teutonic German descent. The Teutonics were the original race of the Germans. Virginia Steury and Jan Hall are descendents of the southern Germans of South Prussia. While Easter Steinhauer has her roots in Switzerland. Virginia Blumenstock, Liz

Jordan, Judith Bartell, Cynthia Gromer and all their children have their roots in Romania and Hungary. Then the Datemas came to us by way of Holland. Once we affiliated with the Congregationalist that brought in people like Perdy and John Scafe of New England and English stock. The one thing most of you have in common is that you are children of the Reformation. You are children of dissenters, of rebels. Most of your ancestors took part in the greatest religious schism in history. Then you have someone like me, of French descent. As far as I know my ancestors were not children of the reformation. This bothers me some, for I have such a rebel's heart—and I often wonder from whence it came.

Plus, I greatly admire that monastic professor from a relatively inconspicuous German University who posted his 95 Theses on the door of the castle church in Wittenberg. What courage to stand against what he knew was wrong within the church! What a faith?

Whenever we feel hopeless or powerless, take heart. It only took the power of faith to make the world a better place, not crusades (war), or inquisitions (blame). It took and takes the power of a profound faith and a willingness to express it.

For some reason God has brought us together as a community of faith. Sometimes we feel discouraged because we are not any bigger than we are. What is it about bigness that is so all-fired attractive? It took only twelve men and a few tag-along women to carry on after Jesus was long gone. If we get too hung up on just trying to grow numerically, we are going to miss the miracle trying to unfold in our midst.

Our coming together may seem to be a random thing until we take the time to look back and see the patterns in God's design. God has given us the talent needed and the right mix of personalities **to offer an extraordinary ministry of hope, healing** and spiritual renewal. **All it takes is the power of a profound faith and a willingness to express it.**

Have you not heard, Jesus is passing our way today? Are you going to let other people, a little shyness or whatever obstacles are keeping your faith from expressing itself, hold you back from shouting, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.”

What’s the miracle for which I’m looking? The same one I came to you with a little over four years ago. The difference from then and now is I’m watching the miracle unfold. The miracle in my heart then and now was to be able to help a congregation implement a spiritual development program and in collaboration, discover, in our shared life, creative opportunities to experience the life-changing presence of God. At the end of five years, the miracle I wished for, to be a part of, a “priesthood of all” that emotes the spirit of Christ in creating a space, where all who come our way will feel accepted and loved, just as they are. “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.” What are the forces at work that try to silence me, the obstacles my faith needs to overcome: the doomsday soothsayer and my lack of patience. “Son of David, have mercy on me.”

(To individuals) “What’s the miracle you’re looking for in your life?” What’s the miracle we are looking for in our church? “Then take heart, rise up, let your voice be heard for Jesus is passing our way this day. ”Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” “What are the forces at work trying to silence you, what are the obstacles your faith needs to overcome? Then shout it again my friends, even louder. Do not let anyone or anything hush you up when you believe a miracle is headed your way. “Son of David, have mercy on me.”

(To everyone) What’s the miracle you’re looking for in your lives? Raise your voice for Jesus is passing our way this day.” “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” What are the forces at work trying to silence you, what are obstacles your faith needs to overcome? Then shout it again my friends, even louder. Do not let anyone hush you up when you believe a

miracle is headed your way.” “Son of David, have mercy on me.” **All it takes is the power of a profound faith and a willingness to express it**—to birth a miracle. Amen.