

04/07/2019

Almighty God, Mary honored the Lord with her gift of perfume. May we honor you in our lives by honoring all who are in need; through Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen!

This Friday, April 12, a movie called Breakthrough will be released nationwide. In it, a 14-year-old named John Smith falls through an icy Missouri lake on a cold winter morning — a tragic, life-threatening and quite literal breakthrough!

After being pulled out of the water, he is taken to the hospital and lies lifeless for more than an hour. CPR is performed for 27 minutes without success. Although his life seems to be over, his mother Joyce is not ready to give up on him. She musters all of her faith and strength, crying out to God to save her son.

Miraculously, there's a new breakthrough! John's heart starts to beat again.

In the days that follow, he defies every scientific prediction and expert opinion. And finally, 16 days after falling through the ice and being clinically dead for an hour, he walks out of the hospital, completely healed.

The movie is based on a true story, as well as on the book written by the mother, Joyce Smith, called "The Impossible: The Miraculous Story of a Mother's Faith and Her Child's Resurrection".

Yes, developments in science can provide wonders we could have never previously dreamed possible. But not everything that happens in life can be explained as a wonder of technology. Miracles do happen, and as is often the case, God continues to remove obstacles, making a way where there is no way.

Our first reading this morning, is part of the second major division of Isaiah (chapters 40-55), largely written from the perspective of Judah's exile in Babylon.

All that the Jewish people held sacred is gone; The land, the Temple, and from their perspective, God's presence. No wonder they wept by the rivers of Babylon. However, God's loving activity was not gone. Even in exile, God is looking after the Jewish people, even if His presence was concealed.

God speaking through Isaiah, talks about the first great Exodus when the Israelites were miraculously rescued from the hand of Pharaoh. As important and significant as this was in the history of the Israelites, God now tells them that what is to come is just as amazing. "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? Yahweh, their Creator and the only God, will deliver her people and bring them home from their exile in Babylon. God is again making a way where there is no way.

When you look at Jewish History, authors state that when the Babylonians first attacked Israel, they took away 10,000 of the best and the brightest with them. That seemed like a disaster at the time, but when the rest of the Jews are relocated to Babylon, it turns out to be a blessing. Why? Because when the Jews arrive in Babylon, there is a Jewish infrastructure in place. Yeshivas, or Orthodox Jewish schools, have been established, there is a kosher butcher on the corner and a mikveh, or bath used for the purpose of ritual immersion in Judaism to achieve ritual purity. To a certain extent, Jewish life can continue and as a result, there was less assimilation during the Babylonian exile.

God is present behind the scenes. I believe that often, what we perceive as miracles, are the result of God's unseen presence working among us over a period of time. We are just not aware of it.

This past week, I attended the clergy conference in Dewitt. There was a great deal of information to process and I am still working through a lot of this. We spend the time looking at Episcopal transitions, from the personal, Parish, and Diocesan levels. That was a lot to cover and, in many ways, just touched the surface. From developing a personal relationship with God especially with a deeper prayer life, to looking at how to help our congregations to better focus on the Kingdom of God despite all of the distractions. We talked about how the history of each congregation still affects their lives today. And we talked about the upcoming changes within the Diocese itself. We talked about how the history of the Diocese as a whole affects life today and how we will interact with the new Bishop at the same time as dealing with the loss of Bishop Gibbs. From our perspective here in Adrian, you know the history of this congregation better than I do. And that history

goes back many years. Many of you can point back to events from the past that still affect how we interact today. Events that have happened in our personal lives, our life as a congregation, and our collective lives with this Diocese affect how we interact with God, with each other, and those we minister to. Past interaction with clergy and Bishops have a big part to play whether we are aware of it or not. We need to become aware of those hidden parts of our history and how it affects what we do today and to help us move on to the future.

I read an article written by Charlotte Livesay in 2018. She talks about just how much her past affects her present. Even the past she has long since forgotten.

“Someone called me out this week, and it made me think about why I behave the way I do. I realized how much of a hold my past still has on me. This isn’t always a bad thing.

Sometimes it is good to remember the past and learn from mistakes, unhealthy relationships, or painful confrontations. Other times, it can hold me back. Some mistakes keep me up at night even though no one else remembers that I made them. Sometimes unhealthy relationships keep me from trying to build new ones. Why try to meet new people when being on my own works well? And, honestly, confrontations always seem to be painful no matter how many times I force myself to confront.

She concludes: “I’m not sure my past will ever let go of me, and I know I wouldn’t really want that because it is the foundation of who I am now, metaphorically speaking, roots to a plant. It’s good to know, however, that there is a moment where I get to decide when to stay rooted and when to surpass my previous experiences and attempt to make new, better memories”.

Sometimes we do things in congregations and we don’t know why we do them that way. How often do we hear;

--That will never work here or we have always done it this way.

Sometimes if you ask why, no one is really sure or the person that tried it is no longer there.

I am certainly not talking about our core beliefs as Episcopalians. There are components of our Episcopal tradition that we hold dear **and we should**.

After listening to many stories told by clergy throughout this Diocese as well as to stories that took place in other Dioceses, I felt even more blessed to be with all of you. Despite the challenges that we are all aware of, for good or for bad, we do not have a lot of infrastructure to look at and change. We do not have committees or ministries that are entrenched or no longer seem to have a purpose. We can build together. There is not a congregation in the Diocese that doesn't remember days gone by. When 2 or 3 services on a Sunday were packed. When Sunday schools were full with children running everywhere. Those days are gone for many churches in this country.

But this does not mean that a death knell has sounded. That is the message from Isaiah this morning. Clinging to past glories for the Israelites was not the way to prepare for the clanging new work the Lord was about to sound in their lives. And the same applies to us today.

God performs a variety of breakthroughs in our lives, but they do not have to be miraculous healings. More often, they include **new paths to walk, new stands to take, or new ways to serve.**

But whatever the breakthrough appears to be, it moves us forward and gives us new life. What a surprising message: Don't keep obsessively looking back to even the finest of what God has done. Instead, actively anticipate the new thing God is bringing about. What God did long ago is astounding; what God is about to do is even more awesome! God will guide us along paths we have not yet seen or possibly thought possible. We will walk those paths together and you share the love of God with those we meet along the way. AMEN!