

Its Gonna Take a Miracle

Christmas Eve Homily, December 24, 2020

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"Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time." – Thomas Edison

I'm sharing this quote from Thomas Edison because he was someone who devoted his life to making miracles happen. He didn't give up. Neither should you. Don't give up. Wherever you are, whatever you are experiencing right now...don't give up.

Its going to take a miracle for us to get through this season. There is a weight to this time of year that is deeply uncomfortable. It is the weight of conflict. It is the weight of separation. It is the weight of fear. It is the weight of isolation. It is the weight of loss. I'm describing this as a weight because in my own body, I feel it as a heaviness in my heart. I am searching for a way to untangle this crushing feeling and all I can come up with is the fact that its going to take a miracle to change it.

Miracles are fascinating. So many things that were once considered quite literally miracles are now commonplace. Flight. Cures from common illness. The potential for longevity. The internet. Not to mention refrigeration and indoor plumbing. Descriptions of the future of science from earlier times seem quaint to us now and what we say about our technology today will seem quaint in the future. Someday, someone will do a sketch on the 150th season of Saturday Night Live about the need for and design of the "mute" button as something hopelessly old fashioned and inefficient.

And here we are today, gathered through a miracle, all of us in separate places, but joined in one virtual space searching for the miracle of connection, trying to manage our lives distantly from one another to create a miracle of healing. And we choose this time to come together because of what was regarded by ancient people as a prophetic miracle in the birth of one child.

Miracles are fascinating. Sometimes they are not simply about technology. Instead, sometimes miracles are present in how we are transformed by our experience of the world. I think of people who have the hard cold stone of racism in their hearts but are transformed by an experience that reveals the full and divine humanity of someone who is racially different to them. I

think of the change in an anti-lgbtq parent who is misguided in their limited perception by their faith only to recognize that same God they worship and love in their transgender child. I think of someone who has regarded mental illness as weakness and frailty and not an actual illness that deserves treatment and comprehensive care who then recognizes such an illness in themselves or someone they love and becomes an advocate. We are transformed by the miracle of our experience and more importantly by the miraculous experience of each other.

As a child I was taught the story of the birth of Jesus in the context of the church. It was for me an obligation and something that just came with having to see grandparents and sing hymns and stay up late on Christmas Eve. It took me until I was a full blown adult who no longer only identified with the Christian experience to actually have a place to put this story so that I could apply it to my life. I'm sure I'm not alone in this. As we get older we get more reflective and contemplative. Obligation turns to observation and exploration. What is particularly inspiring to me is that as I look at the story of the birth of Jesus, not just on the other side of seminary but as a growing and aging adult, who like many of you has experienced deep loss and euphoric joy. I get something else from it now when I think of it in the context of what miracles really are.

I know now as I hear the story that anticipation, the anticipation of birth, the anticipation of celebration and the anticipation of salvation, whatever form that may take for each of us, are bundled up in this one child and its part of what makes the desperate journey of Mary and Joseph to find lodging so important. I am also willing to recognize that the promise represented by the birth of this child is not limited to only the believing Christian but can be embraced by all of us who regard the birth of new life as the promise of tomorrow. As I grow in my capacity to hold this story with a lighter yet more nuanced touch, and a deeper personal meaning, I am also given the gift of what it means to witness the fulfillment of a prophesy that though ancient and specific invites me into a place of great hope. Lastly, this story, particularly on the heels of this challenging year, invites me into an internal conversation about the power and true meaning of redemption. But this is a redemption that is does not have to rest solely on sin and forgiveness for its meaning, but is more intricately woven into our day to day understanding of how we are called into relationship with our being and how we must always return, time and again to what it means to allow ourselves to be called back into relationship...with each other, with our physical world, with our spiritual path, with our mortality.

We have this miracle today. We have miracles every day. As our world careens from crisis to crisis, from loss to loss, from shock to shock, it is so very important that we don't get forever stuck on these pivot points of sadness, grief and struggle. What is strung between each of those trying times is a shining thread, a web. A web of connection. A web of anticipation, promise, fulfillment and redemption. Like a web, carefully spun, we need the turning points, the joints to create the tension. We cannot avoid them. But it is the actual fiber of the web itself that dominates overall and gives us the full picture of a vast shimmering, and glorious life.

In so many ways, this Christmas is telling us that, it's going to take a miracle.

But Christmas also reminds us that we live miracles every day.

Be the miracle.

May it be so.

-ALD