

## SERMON 897

November 16, 2014

23rd Week after Pentecost

972nd Week as Priest

799th Week at St Dunstan's

64th Week at Epiphany-Tallassee

### A MIRACLE HAPPENED

*Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. AMEN.*

Yesterday, a miracle happened in Tallassee. The Kingdom of God appeared just north of the new Wal-Mart, about three-tenths of a mile from there, in a little house set back from the highway. The yard around the little house was filled with old cars of every make and description, and people were sitting in them because of the cold, or standing around talking with each other, waiting for the doors to open.

At nine o'clock sharp, the doors opened and there was a great exclamation of anticipation and relief. The people were poor, and they were hungry. It had been a month since they were there last. This was the third Saturday in November, and they were hoping to get food like they did last year—food for Thanksgiving—cranberry sauce, sweet potatoes, the

ingredients for dressing, green beans, and more. They were not disappointed. The people from the Episcopal Church of the Epiphany had been twice to Montgomery to buy food, and the shelves and freezers were full to overflowing.

They were joined by eight students and friends from St. Dunstan's in Auburn, who brought 72 care packages of Thanksgiving food. The morning air was crisp and the sun was shining brightly. There was hope, and possibility, and laughter everywhere.

“Lord, when did we see you hungry?” asked the people. Jesus said, “When you saw the least of these, and they were hungry, and you fed them, you saw me, and you fed me.”

But they gave away more than food, much more. They gave away love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, and they gave it away for free. It was a morning in God's Kingdom—and everyone knew that something was different. It was a fullness of time, and they knew that nothing would be the same thereafter. They now understood that they could see Christ in the faces of the poor. We knew Christ's love because they had given it away. We found ourselves in forgetting ourselves.

Once again, Jesus told a parable, which you recall from last Sunday is a metaphor, a symbolic representation, a way of speaking of the larger reality beyond our immediate circumstances. It is not meant to be taken literally, and yet there is a truth, or truths, in the parable which can apply to each of our lives.

The Bible has this capacity to a degree which is unlike any other book I have ever read. The Scriptures open our hearts and minds to Truth, Beauty, and Goodness in a unique way; open your Bible at random, and the likelihood is very great that you will find that the words you read have an applicability, a meaning, to the present situation and circumstances of your life.

I did this very thing yesterday. I opened the Good News Bible on my desk and found the third chapter of Job. It said,

Why let people go on living in misery? Why give light to those in grief? They wait for death, but it never comes; they prefer a grave to any treasure. They are not happy till they are dead and buried.

This is not a trick, not a magic act. It is simply true that the Bible is transcendental. Its subject is Truth, Beauty, and Goodness—the nature of God—and therefore, it speaks to us

in a way like no other. It is the Most Important of Books, and it demands our careful attention.

So, back to Job. What I found in the third chapter of Job was the Human Condition. And here is what the Human Condition teaches us:

If we seek fulfillment in our own sad selves, or in an abundance of possessions; if we strive for more, and more, and more, to satisfy our cravings and give rest and peace to our minds; if we conclude that the present reality is all there is, and nothing more (the modern cliché is ‘It is what it is’), and that there is no hope, no future, no promise, no covenant; no Truth, Beauty, or Goodness—then we are as good as dead, and a people most to be pitied.

But if we recognize that there is much more to this life than getting and spending, much more than pleasing ourselves and getting ahead—then we start to realize that using our talents to help others in need is the secret to abundant life.

Truth, Beauty, and Goodness are to be found outside ourselves. Encouraging one another and building up each other is the way to healing, wholeness, and health—and not for ourselves only, but for the world in which we live.

We are called on to make good use of the talents which we are given. We should put them to work, and make them count for something. Such work can begin in the smallest of ways—what the poet Wordsworth called, “that best part of a good man’s life, his small unremembered acts of kindness and of love.”

There is repentance at the heart of this decision. It is a true change of direction, a *metanoia*. You are living your life each day in a certain way that serves only your self, and you decide to go in a new direction, to live in a new way. You have been critical, or negative, or unhelpful and selfish. Like the Prodigal Son, you ‘come to yourself’ and realize that you must live in a new way.

This must be our aim as followers of Christ—to live no longer for ourselves; to live for Christ, with Christ, and in Christ; to believe in things seen and unseen; to use our talents to discover and share God’s Kingdom; to live in a community of loving-kindness; and on the third Saturday of every month—to feed the hungry. **AMEN.**

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