

Unbind Yourself

For those of us who were alive at the time and can think back this far, let's harken back to February 1980. The Winter Olympics were being held in Lake Placid, NY and the USA Men's Hockey team was on the verge of defeating Russia for the first time in twenty years. As the clock was ticking down, Al Michaels uttered the famous line, "Do you believe in miracles?" It was a wonderful event, even for those who were not sports fans. It was also when the "USA! USA! USA!" chant became popular. There was even a movie made about it.

Are we ever proud to be Christians? Do we ever boast about it? Well, sometimes we do. I know that I do. I know I shared that I continue to be in awe that I have been called to serve as your pastor. When I saw the posting online about the First Congregational Blessed Buys giving a donation to the Westfield Food Pantry from their sales, I was proud. I know that when I saw people working so hard to get ready for and then welcome everyone into "Pasta with the Pastor" on Friday night in Southwick, I was beaming with pride as well.

While I am able to name pride as the feeling, were these things miracles that they happened? No. Some may be amazed that we opened a thrift shop in Westfield or that we held an event where we simply wanted people to come, eat, and feel our hospitality in Southwick. But the fact that they happened were not miracles. They were the efforts of various people who came together with a common idea, sought the advice of others around them, and then worked hard to make their vision a reality? Those who were involved may think it was a miracle that it happened, but I don't think so.

That leads us to wonder, though: Do miracles still happen? I believe that they do. I think they happen when you least expect it. We can draw a fine line between the miraculous and an authentic miracle. Well, at least I think we can. A miracle is defined 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.” A religious miracle is defined as an “extraordinary and astonishing happening that is attributed to the presence and action of an ultimate or divine power.”

Something that is miraculous has some of the characteristics of a miracle, regardless of a regular or religious miracle. It is kind of like the 2004 Red Sox winning the ACLS and then the World Series. It appeared to come out of nothing so it has some of the characteristics of a miracle.

Raising Lazarus from the dead appears to fall into both categories. It is the faith of Mary and Martha as well as the love that Jesus has for his friend Lazarus that he shows his full “power” as human and Divine. My favorite lines from this passage are “Lazarus, come out” or as it reads in one translation, “Lazarus, come forth!” I am also intrigued by the phrase, “Unbind him and let him go.” Where is Lazarus going? What will he do?

Well, we know that Lazarus, Martha and Mary have a dinner in Jesus’ honor and they do what they can to get on with their lives, even after the death and resurrection of Jesus. Tradition tells us that Mary was at the cross and at the tomb on Easter. It could have been THAT Mary to whom Jesus appears. But what about us: do we need to unbind ourselves to let ourselves go, too?

I wonder how many of us have allowed ourselves to be bound up and not let things go. This means, have we let go of things that hold us down or keep us from strengthening or furthering our relationship with God. Are we bound by our past sins and things that we allowed to happen? Perhaps we are bound by things that happened to us that were no fault of our own. This is sometimes easier said than done but what can we do to help ourselves or allow others to help us to be unbound? I call upon all of us to find our faith—the same faith of Mary and Martha when they told Jesus that they believed he was the Messiah—to help us unbind ourselves and let ourselves be free to follow Jesus to Bethany and Jerusalem in the next two weeks. Let us be free to wave our palm branches and shout “Hosanna to the Son of David.” Let us be free to partake in the meal on Maundy Thursday. Let us be free stand at the cross with Jesus and the women who persevered. Then we can be free to rejoice at the empty tomb on Easter Sunday with our own shouts of “Alleluia! Christ is risen, indeed!”

Let us unbind ourselves to revel in the boundless love that our God
has for us. Amen!