

*"I need a miracle"*

by James "Buster" Hall

This morning my message is part sermon, part witness, but it is all love; love for God, love for my faith, and love for all of you.

The scripture I chose for this morning's message is Matthew 26: 36-44

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go over there and pray." And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again.

These are the words of God for the people of God.  
(Thanks be to God.)

In a few short days, my sisters and I will mark 40 years since our mother went home. My mother always wanted her children to follow their own paths, but she held out a separate wish for me. She hoped that one day I would become a Methodist minister. Needless to say, I didn't follow her wish. But this morning I am preaching in a Methodist church. This is for you Mom. May the meditations of my heart, my soul, and my mind be made manifest in my words, amen.

When Pastor Don texted me several weeks back asking if I wanted to preach the sermon on October 23<sup>rd</sup>, I responded immediately with my acceptance and my gratitude. I felt excited and humbled. The first thing I did afterwards was text my sisters and my daughter to let them know. Next, I thought, OK, now what am I going to talk about? My first thought was to go to the lectionary calendar. There was something from Joel, a Psalm, something from 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy, and another from the gospels. Yet when I looked them up in my Bible I was underwhelmed. I didn't see anything that spoke to me. I had some lukewarm desire to talk about the scripture from 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy, but I didn't feel a great desire about that initial choice. Then a few days later, Daniel Comer texted me to ask about what music I

might want to go with my message. Oh great, something else to consider. I thought about the scripture from the lectionary in light of the music I was familiar with and I didn't see any connections.

That following Sunday morning, as I dressed for church, I was watching music videos on YouTube from the Christian rock group, Third Day. Their song, "I Need a Miracle" came on and I knew exactly what message I wanted to deliver. I felt the need to witness to you in my message this morning.

As a teacher, I require all of my students to write. Sometimes it is an important research paper, other times it is simply a journal entry, but I make them write. The often given advice if you are looking for something to write about, is to write about something you know. I guess I can use that same advice into what I want to say this morning, I know about miracles.

The word "miracle" comes from the Latin "*mirus*", or, wonderful. When we pray for miracles, we are usually praying for something not easily seen as wonderful. The first definition of miracle is "an event or action that apparently contradicts known scientific laws". The second definition is "a remarkable thing". It is the remarkable thing that has no ready explanation we call a miracle. But what brings us to pray for a miracle are those times when we have nowhere to turn, no one to help us, but God.

I don't like labels, I don't like when we label one another. When we label someone, we see them as the label and not as the person they are. Labels can be anything; lazy, crooked, straight, gay, Muslim, black, Hispanic, man, woman. We should always remember people have no labels, except the labels we give them. But there are a few labels I believe in: If I call you friend, you are my friend. If I call you brother, or sister, I see you as my brother or my sister. But I also see people in another sort of label and that is the label of those who have fallen on their knees in quiet desperation and those that will. As the song says, "It don't matter who you are, it don't matter what you have done", we will all come to that point, if we haven't already. In the scripture I just read, even Jesus was in that moment of quiet desperation there in the garden of Gethsemane, moments before his betrayal. He knew what he faced and in that dark night, alone, he reached out in prayer to be delivered from the tribulation and death he knew was coming.

What is a miracle?

I said a few moments ago that I know miracles and I do. I have seen my sister battle against cancer and win. I have seen my daughter born. I have seen the miracle of dawn after the storm. I have lain in a ditch, with bullets from a murderer smacking into the ground all around me and I prayed to live, to survive, and I did.

I have seen miracles, both big and small. But I want to focus on one miracle, the miracle that brought me to my knees.

Before I tell you about that miracle, I want to share with you a story I heard, in several variations, one you may also have heard; a hiker was taking a new path through the mountains one day and as the day progressed, the hiker was deep in the mountains when he realized he was lost. As the hiker thrashed around looking for a way home, he stopped and thought for a moment. It had been years since he had prayed, not since he was a child. He had followed his own path as an adult, a path that led him away from God. Now, with darkness coming and the firm conviction that he was lost, he fell to his knees and prayed, "God, if you are there, I need to know the way home. I am lost and I need you to show me the path home. God, are you there?" He stayed on his knees, listening, the wind rustled the tree limbs above his head, but there was no voice.

Despondently, he began to rise and when he stood up, he saw in the distance another hiker. He yelled and waved his arms and the other hiker, stopped and waved back. The lost hiker dusted off his knees and he took off in the direction of the distant hiker and he muttered to himself, "See, God isn't there."

I know miracles. I was talking with my sister Sue recently, discussing what I would talk about this

morning and I mentioned how I prayed when our mother was battling cancer when I was 18. And Sue said how she had prayed for our mom's healing and then she told me our mother had told her how she prayed that she, our mother, wouldn't suffer with cancer. We all have family and friends who have and are fighting against terrible diseases and afflictions, with addictions and loss, grief and loneliness, and we pray for miracles for them and rightly so. But remember our Lord and his predicament. At the end of each of his three prayers in the garden, praying for deliverance, Jesus left it in God's hands, "may your will be done". We pray for miracles, but at the end we must leave it all in God's hands.

I know miracles. Several years ago, I was at a point in my life that was so dark, so painful, I was beginning to believe there was no way out. It literally was a dark and cold night. I was alone. I had no one. But God. I found myself falling to my knees, in the cold and the dark, praying to God to show me the way home. There were tears freezing on my face, the pain in my heart was tearing me apart and I was praying to God to give me direction and all I heard was the north wind blowing. There was no voice. And there it was that dark as night thought that I could end it all, that I had the means to stop the pain. For the briefest of eternities that black thought took me to a place that sometimes you don't return from. But I knew I needed someone to bring me

back to the path and so I went into the house and I reached out. I called my sister. She could have not answered the call. She could have been busy with her own life and just screened the call, but she answered the phone. I begged her through the tears to “talk me back to center”. I needed her to show me the path back home and she did. I can’t remember what she said or what I said, other than the plea to bring me back to center. But when the call was over, I realized how easy it was for that dark thought to creep into my mind, so I unloaded my pistol. I disassembled it. I hid its parts and ammunition all over the house. I didn’t want to have a ready answer if that black thought returned. But my miracle wasn’t done.

In that longest of dark nights, I laid in bed, staring at the clock across the room. The pain in my heart was there, it had not diminished and I prayed to God, “Please God, get me through the next five minutes”. I would repeat that prayer for five minutes until it was time for another five minutes. And I prayed that prayer all night, until I could see the light of the new day replacing the dark night. While the pain was still there, it was a little less, and it got less with each day and the black thought never again entered my mind. I know miracles.

Some of us need big miracles and some of us need small miracles. But the desperation that drives us to

our knees, asking God for a miracle is one we will all come to at some point in our life. When that time comes, pray; pray deeply, pray humbly, and pray unceasingly.

As we come today to pray, to pray for a miracle, to pray for others, to pray praise, to pray for forgiveness, the thing we come together for is to pray. A few years ago I stopped to speak with a friend whose husband had recently passed away. She asked how I knew of his passing and I said I had seen a prayer request for her family in our church bulletin. She isn't a member of our church and as far as I know she hasn't even visited here. Yet, she knew us immediately. She said "Yes, that's the praying church." What a wonderful reputation to have.

As I come to the conclusion of my message this morning, I want to reiterate the lyrics of the song, "it don't matter who you are, it don't matter what you have done", we can all come to the knowledge that God is always there. We just need to leave it all in His hands.

I am reminded of the poem that most of us have seen and read at some point about footprints in the sand. My mother was the one who pointed this poem out to me over 40 years ago. That poem reads like this:

One night I dreamed a dream.

As I was walking along the beach with my Lord.

Across the dark sky flashed scenes from my life. For



each scene, I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand, One belonging to me and one to my Lord.

After the last scene of my life flashed before me, I looked back at the footprints in the sand.

I noticed that at many times along the path of my life, especially at the very lowest and saddest times, there was only one set of footprints.

This really troubled me, so I asked the Lord about it.

"Lord, you said once I decided to follow you, You'd walk with me all the way.

But I noticed that during the saddest and most troublesome times of my life, there was only one set of footprints.

I don't understand why, when I needed You the most, You would leave me."

He whispered, "My precious child, I love you and will never leave you never, ever, during your trials and testings.

When you saw only one set of footprints, It was then that I carried you."

Most of us will not have the opportunity to visit the Holy Land, yet every day we can still walk in the footsteps of Jesus. We can pray as he taught us to pray. We can pray as he did in the garden, in his quiet moment when he was saddened and troubled, asking that the cup be taken from him. Yet for the depth of his prayer, at the

lowest point of his life, he, at the end, left it all in God's hands. Can we do any less?

Amen.