

The Eagle

St. John Lutheran Church + Houghton Lake, Michigan 48629

February 2014

The View from Here

What about Miracles Today?

Perhaps you have read or will read the article in our February “The Eagle” about the remarkable recovery of our beloved sister in Christ and fellow member of St. John, **Ene Simon**, who fell ill at the Detroit Metro Airport this last Fall as she prepared to board an airplane to China with her husband, Dr. Jack Simon, also a member of St. John. Jack had spent two years preparing a global meeting in China with various engineers around the world. Since Ene fell seriously ill before leaving the airport, the trip and conference for them was cancelled. It appears now, having reviewed what Ene and Jack went through over the last few months, had Ene arrived in China, she would not be with us on this earth today. If this is not a miracle, it’s the closest thing to it!

What is a miracle then? The answer to the question if miracles do happen of course depends on what is a miracle. How do we define the notion *miracle*? Looking the word in the dictionary didn't really help me. Let's just say it is something that happens that does not agree with the normal natural laws, and thus, we expect an involvement of the supernatural. Maybe it is better to give some examples. See if you think the following events can be called a miracle:

- A person is cured from an illness after people prayed for healing, even while this is medically not possible or highly unlikely.
- Someone experiences the presence of something he or she calls *God*, and afterwards, is a different type of person.
- A man speaks a language he never learned.
- Someone struggles with a very bad habit or addiction, and is free of it, after praying for that.

You can perhaps think up other examples. Perhaps the first 'type' is most well known in Christianity, and there are many different illnesses, some even deadly, of which there are reports (or claims, as the atheist would say) of curing after prayer.

Well, of each of the miracles mentioned above, I personally know people that have experienced what could be called miracles. Our Lord Jesus certainly performed miracles during His ministry on earth, so they are a reality and we cannot deny their existence.

When talking about miracles, however, there are a few things that should be warned about and made clear. Sometimes miracles that we would like to happen do not happen. In so many cases, people with a mortal illness for which we pray for healing, die. Note that the fact that something sometimes does not happen does not imply it never happens. So, while God indeed works in our lives, this does not mean that everything is always easy.

I believe any discussion of the topic of miracles today must come with a warning. All good things are a gift of God to us, for which we can be grateful: food, our houses, loving spouse, etc. Doctors and their medical knowledge are also a gift of God to us. I believe that many incidents of ‘miracles’ are more the result of superior medical training and technology, but certainly not always. So, if we are ill, we should have medical care. I believe the idea of some people that one should not see doctors, but *only* pray for healing is wrong and dangerous.

Most importantly, however, miracles should not get in the way of our faith! The object of our faith is Jesus Christ, not miracles. To depend on miracles to get through life or tough times is to displace the true object of our faith with an idol ... the miracle. Our Lord Jesus teaches us to come to Him in prayer in times of thankfulness as well as times of need. We ask for His guidance, His love, His support through Word and sacrament. But we should not be so presumptuous as to ask for something we have not been promised He would give ... a miracle. This throws a 'monkeywrench' into faith in God's promises. The church must remember that the Holy Spirit and His gifts are offered only where God has promised them ... in the Word and sacraments. The Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions frequently emphasize that the Holy Spirit builds the church solely through the means of grace (the Word and the sacraments). Only through the witness of the Gospel and the sacraments does the believer come to faith, receive the assurance of God's love and forgiveness, witness to others, live in accord with God's will, and remain steadfast in the faith.

While we Lutherans appreciate and fully value the importance of spiritual experience, the Lutheran Confessions always point us to the objective promise of the Gospel as the unfailing basis of hope and certainty both in this life and in the life to come. As Dr. Francis Pieper has written:

"... saving faith is always faith in the Word of Christ, faith in the external Word of the Gospel, which Christ commanded His Church to preach and to teach (Mark 16:15-16; Rom. 1:1-2). This external Word is both the object of faith ('Believe the Gospel,' Mark 1:15) and the means by which faith is created ('Faith cometh by hearing,' Rom. 10:17). A belief whose object is not the Word of Christ as we have it in the Word of His Apostles (John 17:20) ... is according to the Scriptures a delusion, ignorance, and a human fabrication (1 Tim. 6:3-4; 1 Cor. 2:1-5: 'faith in the wisdom of men')."

Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, I, trans. W. F. Albrecht and others
(St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), p. 84.

Such teaching as depending on or looking to miracles for deliverance directs the troubled sinner to his own experience as the basis for his certainty and it places him once again under the bondage of the Law. This leads either to a self-righteous confidence in one's own experience or to spiritual despair for the person who has had no such experience. Confidence in human experience is carnal security, not the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit, who always directs us to Jesus Christ and God's promise in the preaching (teaching) of the Gospel, Holy Baptism, Holy Absolution, and Holy Communion. It is important that Christian people be warned against doctrine or teaching which is presented as the Word and will of God, when in fact the Sacred Scriptures do not clearly teach such doctrine.

I believe that there are indeed miracles, done by God ... I've seen them more than once ... like Thomas the apostle who believed after he saw the Risen Christ. I pray that readers of this will experience God's work in their life and know what Jesus has done for them. *Hebrews 1:1-2* ***¹Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ²but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.***

That's the View from Here

Pastor Bill Winter

All Praise to God for Ene's Miraculous Healing!

Dear friends and colleagues: It is with great joy that I can bring you up to date with my wife's illness and multiple surgeries. To fast forward, she was hospitalized at the Medical College of George on 9/11 and had a perforated ulcer in her stomach which caused her to go septic, shutting down all her major organs. Then 3 brain seizures, pneumonia and an operation that removed a third of her stomach and her duodenum did not give her a positive outlook. But we have an awesome God who was always with us. Today, I am happy to tell you that after 9 weeks in the Trauma ICU, 1 week in the Select Specialty Care Hospital and another month at Anchor Rehab that Ene is doing great. Her revised plumbing system is working as it should and she shows no after effects from all this hospital stay including 3 weeks in a coma. A little over a month ago she could not stand but now she is walking without a walker and in great spirits.

This note is really to tell you how much we appreciated your prayers, words of comfort, plates of food, invites to your home for dinner, cards and letters and visits. Our God is to be praised for this miracle for that is what this is. I was told she would not last the night. I was told countless times she can't survive all this. But thanks be to God for his mercy and healing. Thanks to all of you for being there for me when her outlook was dim. I wanted to share this with you as I have tried to use this media of email to keep many of you in the loop as this journey unfolded. I received the greatest Christmas gift ever this year. Having my honey back!

Next week I will begin a ministry at Harbor Chase Retirement Center and Anchor Rehab here in Aiken, S.C. to encourage and minister in song and word to those no longer able to attend their church due to their physical or mental condition. God has opened my eyes to the needs of older citizens who are experiencing illness or recovering from operations.

Thanks once again to you all for your kindness in so many ways to Ene and I. Since the middle of September I only had to cook 2 meals, which is a unbelievable tribute to neighbors, friends, and church members for their generosity and compassion.

Jack G. Simon
133 Windermere Way
Aiken, S.C. 29803
Tel: 803 642-9491
Email: jackandene@yahoo.com