

“Unanticipated good news”

June 10, 2007

Text: 1 Kings 17:8-24, Luke 7:11-17

I.

We've had a wild and, yet, wonderful week at the church. To begin with, summer camp began with over 100 children ... double the size from previous years. Also, it was Vacation Bible School week at our church.

You can imagine what Monday morning was like with every parent scurrying to get their child on track ... then calling to make sure they were doing okay ...

Life can be stressful at times ... yet, through it all, if we allow ourselves the freedom to step back from it all often enough, good things happen.

- New learning takes place.
- New relationships are formed.
- New people join the church (*note: this morning we took in 7 new members*)- ...

Friends, we have to just keep looking for the good ... and lifting up the positive ... staying close to God, opening our minds, hearts and spirits to God's presence. Because, always, every day, God is working in our midst ... building good news experiences ...

The word for today is: keep looking up because good news is on the way.

II.

A substitute Sunday School teacher couldn't open the combination lock on the supply cabinet one Sunday morning ... so she went to the pastor for help. Pastor to the rescue.

The pastor started turning the dial on the combination lock, stopped after the first two numbers, looked up serenely toward heaven, began moving his lips silently, then turned to the final number and opened the lock.

The teacher gasped, *Wow, that was really something. I'm in awe of your faith, pastor!*

Really, the pastor replied. *Well, let me tell you. It's really nothing; the number is on a piece of tape on the ceiling.*

The obvious lesson in this story is just keep looking up, because—again—good news is on the way.

III.

In our reading from 1 Kings, from the dramatic prophetic activity of the ninth century prophet, Elijah, good news is everywhere.

Elijah is sent by the Lord to a widow in *Zarephath*, which, to begin with, is a Gentile community, which means this widow wasn't a Jew.

In other words, by including this story in the Hebrew Scriptures, the faith of Israel is being stretched. Not only is the prophet of God sent off to assist a widow, an utterly powerless member of community, but she is also a Gentile, a non-Jew. There's a ring of *universalism* in this story, therefore, right from the start.

As the story unfolds, the woman, in her poverty, and most notably in her scarcity, obeys the request of Elijah to bring him food and drink. In asking this favor of the destitute woman, Elijah assures her that she will be blessed with an endless supply of food and oil.

And so it is.

But then, later, the widow's son somehow becomes seriously ill and the spark of life goes out of him ... and of course, the woman is inconsolable in her sadness and grief ... and she points to Elijah as the source of her misfortune and despair.

Overcome with compassion for the woman's plight, Elijah, then, stretches himself upon the child three times, pleading with the Lord each time ... *O Lord my God, let this child's life come into him again!*

And of course the son is called back to life and the woman is ecstatic with joy. Good news is all about. The scent of *miracle* is in the air ... the Spirit is on the move. The voices of goodness and transformation are swaying the moment.

Don't we all like miracles? Certainly the miracles of the Bible draw us in ... they invite us to look at the world through the eyes of faith. Through the eyes of faith, anything is possible. In fact, through the eyes of faith, nurtured by a loving heart and a sometimes-daring spirit, our lives are always on the edge of being *surprised by grace*.

IV.

When Mike Peters won the Pulitzer Prize for political cartoons (1981), he wasn't expecting the honor. He described his reaction to the award by saying ...

*It's kind of like you are asleep and it is two-o'clock in the morning and you're hugging your pillow and you're in your funny pajamas ... and suddenly somebody bursts into your bedroom shouting, **Wake up, wake up!***

*And you say, **What is it?***

*And they say, **You've just won the Boston Marathon!***

*And you say, **But I'm not running in the Boston Marathon.***

*And they say, **It doesn't make any difference; you won.***

Unanticipated GOOD NEWS. When good things happen that we in no way expected. When despair gives way to hope ... and sorrow is transformed into joy. When the miraculous becomes reality.

We see this again in our earlier reading from Luke 7 where the son of the widow at Nain, having died, is called back to life by Jesus. Jesus sees the funeral procession as it is leaving the community and is overcome with compassion for the heart-broken widow.

Touching the coffin, Jesus says, *Young man, I say to you rise!* And somehow the dead man stands up and begins to speak ... and the people are amazed.

Miracles draw us in. They lift our hope. But more than anything, they invite us to embrace our everyday world through the eyes of faith.

They remind us that we don't know as much as we think we know ... and that always, for people of faith, God has another word ... a different word from what the world expects.

V.

One day in an 11th grade math class, a student entered to wait for his friend. Not wanting to leave him out, the teacher invited him to *go to the blackboard* to solve one of the problems they were working on.

But I'm not one of your students, the guest student replied.

That's okay, go to the board anyway.

However, the student was really hesitant; and he began telling the teacher that he wasn't as advanced as these students in his class ... that he was in a slower class and that he, no doubt, wouldn't be able to do the problem.

The teacher came over to the student and said to him, *Don't ever say that again! Someone's opinion of you does not have to become your reality.*

That became a liberating moment for the student, an experience of *unanticipated good news*. Soon the teacher became the mentor for this teenager and later he was the speaker at graduation ceremonies ... where he exhorted the students:

Each one of you has greatness within you. The key is to discover that greatness and to nurture it. Each of you has the capability of touching millions of lives.

That student was Les Brown, who went on to become a successful band leader in the United States producing five specials on public television.

Unanticipated good news!

VI.

The truth of our lives is that there's good news itching to break through all about us ... even when we're not aware of it. The KEY, always, is love ... to seek to do the loving thing wherever we can, as often as we can, for whomever we can.

Miracles happen, friends, through us. We are God's vehicles for the work of the holy. God's purposes are realized through us.

- Reaching out with caring, loving hearts ...
- never giving up ... aiming high ... being willing to take risks ...
- moving outside our comfort zone ... building up one another in love.

We never know when GOOD NEWS is going to break through and totally change our life or the life of someone we know.

Miracles happen friends, through the eyes of faith ... every day. We need only believe and do our best everyday to fill the world with love.

All praise be unto God! Amen!

Dr. Jeffrey E. Frantz
Miami Lakes Congregational Church, *United Church of Christ*
6701 Miami Lakeway South
Miami Lakes, FL 33014
On the web at www.mlchurch.com