

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time January 14, 2007

Most of you have probably heard the old joke about the man stuck on his roof in rising flood waters who just keeps praying to God that God will keep him safe. The waters are rising at an extraordinary pace. The wind is howling. Everyone else in the neighborhood is either already out of danger or on their way. But this man clings to his roof shingles and keeps praying out loud: “God, save me from this danger.”

A neighbor floats up in his row boat and cries: “please jump in.” But the man says: “No, I’ll be okay; God will not let me down.” A few minutes later, a police launch drives up and begs him to grab the rope to safety. But again the man says: “No, I’ll be okay. God will not let me down.” Finally, a Coast Guard helicopter hovers overhead and its bull-horn urges the man to climb the ladder to safety. But again the man says: “No thanks! God will not let me down, I know it.”

The waters rage, the wind howls, and the man is finally swept off his roof. He arrives at the pearly gates where St. Peter says: “God’s been waiting for you.” The man approaches God and in his most perplexed voice says: “How could you let me down that way? Where were you?” God looks even more perplexed and says: “Give me a break! I sent you a rowboat, a launch, and a helicopter. How could you be so stupid?”

The story poses the same question the church returns to at the beginning of another Ordinary Season liturgically. For weeks now, all throughout the Advent and Christmas seasons, we’ve been proclaiming *Emmanuel*, God is with us,. But the ordinary question we return to today is: Exactly *how* is God with us? How and where do we find the presence of God in everyday life, in our lives? How does God *act* in the world these days? And just like in the story about the man on his roof waiting for something spectacular to happen, we find that God, in fact, comes in a variety of ways that often surprise us not because they are always spectacular or stunning, but because they lie right under our noses.

John’s gospel this morning illustrates well that sometimes God’s manifestation still can be stunning. Wouldn’t it be nice if at every dinner party someone would transform Boston’s best tap water into Chateau neuf du Pape? That’s not always going to happen, trust me. But remember, for St. John,

Jesus' miracles are not so much about straining or defying the physical laws of nature. The miracles are for John signs, pointers. He says in today's gospel this "miracle" at Cana was the first of Jesus' signs. Signs of God's presence, signs of who this Jesus really is, signs of manifestation. This gospel story is really still a part of the Epiphany celebration, as it is in all the Eastern churches. It proclaims that God's signs are all around us.

Most post-modern men and women—even men and women of faith—don't place much stock in miracles anymore. They seem quaint, somehow primitive—especially when they are on the grand scale of violating nature's rather predictable laws. But if you think with St. John, and think of miracle as a sign-post, a pointer, then who has not experienced a miracle?

Some of you here work in education (perhaps right here at B.C.). If you teach anything at all, have you never had the experience of watching a young mind and heart explode with freshness and excitement at learning something new? It may not happen often, I can hear you professors moaning, but when it does, haven't you often felt (if not said): "My God, it's a miracle!" At least it can be a sign—of freshness, of growth, of graciousness, of hope, of God.

Or those of you who work providing health services, how often have you experienced the totally unexpected, totally unexplained, happen? How often have you experienced first-hand the difference between cures and healing? Sometimes you get strangely lucky and you get to experience what actually look like old-fashioned miracles. But even more often, I suspect, if you are looking, you can see the unmistakable signs of healing, or of peace, or of tranquility even in the face of immanent death, for example. Simple inner peace is a remarkable gift for any of us at any time in life. Peace is in itself, a miracle, a sign of God's promise.

I'm sure you have all heard or read about the strange story of the humorist and columnist Art Buchwald. He was given three weeks to live last Spring, promptly checked into a Hospice in Washington to die, experienced a medically-baffling remission, checked out of hospice early in the summer and returned to Martha's Vineyard to party the summer away with his friends. All he could say was: "I guess

they're not ready for me up there yet." Strange things do happen. Miracles do happen. And signs are all around us.

That brings us to St. Paul's instruction today. Are you still looking for how God's presence manifests itself in human history? Do you still want to know how God acts in your own world? Paul says: look around! And listen to each other. Sometimes God speaks in wise people, and we've all probably known one or two wise people in our lives. Sometimes in knowledgeable and learned people. Sometimes through persons of great faith. Sometimes through healers. Sometimes in persons of great courage and integrity. These are the gifts of the Spirit, Paul tells us.

Sometimes God's signs come through churches, sometimes the signs have nothing to do with churches. Sometimes God's signs bring peace and tranquility; sometimes God's signs bring discord and great confusion. This child we just celebrated at Christmas, this adult Jesus at Cana, "has come for the rise—and fall—of many."

But, Paul says, there is only one Spirit behind all the signs, one Spirit who is enfleshed now only in us, and who speaks now only through us. It's not just polite to listen to each other on occasion; it's the only way to hear the signs of God's presence, to experience the miracles of today's world. They are *in* us—quite literally—waiting to be heard. Look around in this church. Isn't that a scary thought. Right next to you—or in front or behind you—may be today's miracle waiting to happen. St. Paul was not kidding. Neither am I.

Now if you are still feeling your post-Modern cynicism about all this miracle-talk, at least take a cue from the headwaiter in today's gospel. I imagine him somewhat bemused, feeling a touch angry perhaps, at the very least curious, when he says to the bridegroom: "Hey, what's up. You've saved the best stuff for last; this crowd is already drunk, too drunk to even appreciate it. I've never seen anything so stupid in my life. But, it sure is good wine."

The waiter at least has the openness to appreciate the graciousness and gift of what sits under his nose. "Ah, and a lovely bouquet it is indeed." God's graciousness and gift to us all. And it is here!

So, my brothers and sisters, miracles still do happen. Signs of God's presence, and peace, and promise are waiting to be discovered and celebrated. So please make sure the next time your very own personal flood waters are raging, and you are grasping onto the roof of your psyche for dear life, don't miss the rope, or the ladder, or the helicopter. None of us, I'm sure, really wants to hear God say to us at the pearly gate: "Give me a break! Look at all the signs I sent you; look at all the people I gave you. And you let them all float by."

Welcome back to so-called Ordinary Time; maybe it does not need to be quite so ordinary after all.