

Sermon

Has God ever helped you? Has God ever done anything really nice for you? Think about it for a minute.

God's help comes in many ways. Roc Bottomly told how his daughter, Bethany, was saved by a dream. It wasn't Bethany who dreamed the dream, but her friend Jody. While four girls were on vacation, Jody dreamed that they were in a bad accident. In her dream, Jody was the only one wearing a seatbelt, and she was the only survivor.

Jody told her friends about her dream, and they responded by fastening their seatbelts. Later that day, the driver of their car dropped a wheel onto the shoulder of the road and lost control. The car rolled in the median strip, but none of the girls was seriously injured. The investigating officer told them that if they hadn't been wearing their seat belts, the outcome would have been a lot different.

Has God ever given you a message in a dream?

Where do those inspirations come from? Freud would say that it's our unconscious mind at work. He would say that our unconscious mind, working in the background, can solve problems that have proven too much for my conscious mind to solve.

That might be so. Freud might be right. But I believe that something else is at work too. I believe that God is at work. Whether God is solving problems through our unconscious mind or is inspiring us more directly, I believe that God often does for us what we could not do on our own.

Has God ever helped you in some other way? Is it possible that God helped and you didn't even notice? Sometimes God helps us and we call it coincidence. I looked up that word coincidence. It's defined

as “The occurrence of events that happen at the same time by accident but seem to have some connection.”

Events that “seem to have some connection.” Did you ever experience events that seemed to have some connection? Did you ever need something and suddenly find it? When that happens, consider the possibility that God was working quietly in your life!

I have a story for you (you’ve got time, right?). A man lost his wallet. He had his credit cards, his driver's license and his money in that wallet. If he couldn't find his wallet, he couldn't drive to work, at least not legally. He couldn't buy lunch. If someone had stolen his wallet, no telling what the thief would do with his credit cards.

Anxiously, the man prayed for God to help him. A few minutes later, it dawned on him that he had worn some work clothes the previous evening. He looked in the pocket of his work pants, and there was his wallet. So he said, “Never mind, God! I found it!”

Yes, that was a simple and funny story, but it reflects a serious truth: we're far more likely to take God seriously when we are in trouble than when we're not. We often fail to consider the possibility that God is behind the happy coincidences of our lives.

Do you ever thank God for happy coincidences? Give that some thought. You have experienced happy coincidences in the past, and you will experience them in the future. You might even experience one this week. Most happy coincidences seem small. But try to notice the small coincidences in your life. The next time you experience one, take time to reflect on it. What if it hadn't happened? How would your life be different?

Sometimes our small blessings aren't really small. Sometimes our coincidences aren't really coincidences. Sometimes they are God

working behind the scenes. Say a prayer. Thank God for helping you. Thank God for keeping an eye on you.

But in our Gospel lesson today, nobody called what happened a coincidence. They didn't know what to call it. They were confused and bewildered. There was a blind man in town (a man born blind) and Jesus gave him sight. We could say that Jesus restored his sight, but the man had never had any sight to restore. He had been born blind. Jesus created sight from nothing, just as God created the world from nothing, and then Jesus gave that newly created sight to that man.

You would think that everyone would have been happy, but they weren't. It was the Sabbath, and Sabbath law forbade working on the Sabbath. The Pharisees believed that healing was work so that no one should heal on the Sabbath. As far as the Pharisees were concerned, this healing was a sin. As far as they were concerned, Jesus was a clear and present danger to the established order.

So, the Pharisees tried to get the blind man to acknowledge that Jesus was a sinner. You would think that the formerly-blind man could resist that easily, but it wasn't easy. He had been a beggar all his life and begging was all he knew. He was going to need help to get established and these Pharisees were the movers and shakers and could make you or break you.

But the man didn't waver under their questioning. When the Pharisees asked the man what he thought of Jesus, he said, "He is a prophet."

So the Pharisees questioned the man's parents. You would think that the parents would have supported Jesus, but they were afraid that the Pharisees would throw them out of the synagogue. It's hard for us to imagine how devastating that would be. To be thrown out of the synagogue would have been like being run out of town. Faced with such a prospect the parents said, "Our son is of age. Ask him."

So the Pharisees tried to persuade the formerly blind man that Jesus was a sinner, but the formerly blind man said,

“I don't know if he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”

When they continued to press him, he said,

“If (Jesus) were not from God, he could do nothing.”

So the Pharisees drove him out. Did they just run him off, or did they throw him out of the synagogue? We don't know. But the man was undaunted. When he met Jesus later, he said, “Lord, I believe.”

This man had courage – guts! He was born blind and spent a lifetime begging alongside the road, but when the going got tough, he proved even tougher. He became a man of faith when Jesus healed him, and he stayed a man of faith when powerful people started threatening him.

I started this sermon by asking: Has God ever helped you? Has God ever done anything really nice for you? If he did, did you notice? Did you say thanks! Did you grow in faith? Did being the recipient of God's favor make a difference in your life?

This week as the world watches in wonder and fear, watch for the blessings, large or small, that God sends your way. They might be something tremendous, like being healed of a terrible illness. Or they might be more subtle, like re-discovering an old friend. Or they might be something that didn't happen, like a bad car accident or loss of a friend.

Let me close with these words from Robert Louis Stevenson:

The BEST things are NEAREST:
BREATH in your nostrils,
LIGHT in your eyes,
FLOWERS at your feet,
DUTIES at your hand,
THE PATH OF GOD just before you.

Don't forget to thank God for:

BREATH in your nostrils,
LIGHT in your eyes,
FLOWERS at your feet,
DUTIES at your hand,
and THE PATH OF GOD just before you.

May God bless you this week, and may you notice and give thanks!

To the Glory of God!

Please see below the Congregational Prayer

Congregational Prayer

Lord of life, we surely are a stubborn people. We wail and whine about the darkness that seems to claim our lives, yet we persist in creating that darkness to cover our mistakes and our misdeeds. You are merciful and will pardon and heal us. But we are afraid because we cannot forgive ourselves for our own transgressions. Help us let go of the need to continually hide and punish ourselves. Free us from the angry spirit that dwells so deeply in us and in our land. Give us courage and confidence to be people of light, love, hope and peace.

It is with this courage in your light and love that we offer up today concerns for those in our congregation and our friends who are in need of your healing, Lord. We lift up Alfred, Liz Senn's father, Blythe Malvick and Nancy Malvick, Sue Rogahn and David Rogahn, for Amy Such's son, Bill; for Amy Such and Mary Jo's friend, Gretchen; for Don Vollan and Alyce Vollan.

As part of a global nation, we pray for the victims and people infected with the Coronavirus as well as the scientists for their skills and knowledge to find a cure for this pandemic. Give comfort and strength to those on the front lines taking care of the sick.

Lord we give you our thanks and praise as we lift up these many prayers in faith to you, both the spoken and unspoken, for we know that your Spirit is at work in our world making all things new. We pray these prayers in the name of Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.