

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

³⁰The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. ³²And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. ³³Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. ³⁴As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.

⁵³When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. ⁵⁴When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, ⁵⁵and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God

When the Wizard of Oz reached into his bag at the end of movie he found certificates and awards that acknowledged the Scarecrow's intelligence, the Tin Man's empathy, and the Lion's courage, but nothing in the bag could get Dorothy back home so he decided to take her himself in the balloon that took him from the State Fair in Omaha to Oz. One might easily mistake Nebraska for the Land of Oz so I'm not sure how the Wizard determined he landed in a different place. There was an opening in the administration and, as he said, "times being what they were I took the job." Toto spoils the getaway by running after a munchkin moggie as the Wizard ascends.

I had a professor who looked for theological messages in modern media. Now I look at movies and magazines and see Jesus everywhere. So when back on May 13th there was a holy day remembering how Jesus left this world without benefit of a balloon. He ascended into the heavens and was obscured by a bright glowing nimbus. Who's to say Frank Baum didn't have this in mind? The wise one went not from a state fair in the Midwest but from the usual state of turmoil we call the Middle East. He went back home

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to Kansas in the sky, over the rainbow where blue birds fly and troubles melt like lemon drops. That kind of describes how the Gospels portray the time Jesus walked among us as human as you and me. To touch the hem of his garment brought healing. Good thing men wore flowing robes back in the day so more of people had a chance. If he'd gone about in skinny jeans and a tee shirt chances of divine intervention might be slim.

If I sound a little angry or jealous it's because such gifts of miracles in my wake have never graced my ministry. How easy would this job be if Jesus had conferred such power on all who followed in his footsteps? It isn't that I haven't seen miracles of healing, I see them every day, but not as a direct result of me passing by. We all feel cheated as we wrestle with the vagaries, the setbacks, the illnesses, the ill treatment of life and, wish; notice the word wish here, for a visitation of Jesus who would pack up our troubles in his old kit bag. Those churches based on this magical wishing blame the victim for not having faith enough to live through the snake bite, or throw away the crutches.

With faith and medical intervention many can come to toss the braces aside and walk. With prayer and counseling many abandon abusive relationships and come to a new life and hope. With Bible reading and the help of a faithful community a poor person can come to have enough food and shelter. That is the sad advice rendered by Glenda, the Good Witch of the North. I think she kind of plays the role of the Holy Spirit in Baum's book. All hope is lost and Dorothy despairs of ever seeing Kansas again. When I was stuck in England due to a freakish ice storm on the east coast of the US I made my way to the desk to rebook and after listening to the person in front of me give the ticket agent a hard time as if American weather was all her fault I thought of Oz

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when my turn came and I said, "Can I ever hope to see Pittsburgh again?" The agent replied, "Why would you want to?" We both needed a laugh. She sent me home two days later upgraded to first class.

Glenda, the good witch, spoke like the wizard – "You have it in your power, you've had it all along." Sure it would be easier if Jesus came and banished all the bad stuff, but his message has always been, "you have it in your power." We even have it in our power to let go when the time comes and we are to be here no more.

Romans 8: ³⁵ Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Closing Prayer: Almighty God, in Jesus Christ you opened for us a new and living way into your presence. Give us pure hearts and constant wills to worship you in spirit and in truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.