

Well, this week, Bob Baird has been on my mind a lot..

I've been visiting him in the evenings at the Ray Hickey Hospice House – as you know he's failing pretty quickly, now. He's a good man and it's an honor to be with him as he walks through this transition with a good deal of grace and dignity.

It's been a comfort to reflect on the Gospel lesson this week. This next section of Mark contains a lot of the kind of things I've been hoping for – for Bob and for others here and elsewhere.. Restoring people to sanity -- Restoring people to health – Restoring sight to the blind restoring wholeness to lepers, faith to the doubting, and hope to the hopeless.

Miracles.

Exorcising demons --healing the sick -- raising the dead or calming the storm –all of these miracles of Jesus remind us that the way things are is not the way things will always be, and that there is great power available to us through our kinship with Jesus. He is living proof that that God's will for us is not chaos but wholeness and every miracle simply underscores that truth. In every healing, every revival, every banishing of demons we read about -- for just a moment, we see how things will be – or how they really are right now in the mind of God.

God knows I've seen many miracles around here. And you know, sometimes I have a chance to sit back and just be amazed and grateful... But many times, I simply need to put my head down and get back to work, because miracle or not, life goes on.

The once crazy guy pulls himself together and starts to clean up the mess he's made. Peter's mother in law gets busy sweeping the floor or fixing dinner, or whatever she was doing, before she got sick. – the disciples go back to rowing the boat across the lake -- the once blind beggar at the gate walks off to look for a job. Life goes on.

And I too return to the task at hand. Nailing down oak flooring -- get busy and write something down to say, today -- help Mary Etta with laundry -- go over my list of things for the annual meeting and so on. Miracle or not, life goes on.

The problem with miracles is that it is hard to witness them or read about them without wanting one of your own. I know I do for Bob; I do for any number of my friends, here. Every one of us knows someone who is suffering. Every one of us knows someone who could use a miracle, but miracles are hard to come by. Not everyone who prays for one, gets one, and meanwhile there are people out there who get them without even asking for them at all. It's hard to take the apparent randomness of that: Some of us try to figure out the formula: Surely there is one, right? Two parts prayer – one part good works -- three parts faith – something like that: Anyway, we comb these stories to find out who did what right and who did what wrong so that we can learn from their experience. And then we imitate their virtues and we avoid their faults in hopes of attracting our own miracle.

You hear it over and over and over, “Just have faith... Just believe” And that's absolutely true, if our belief is in God's power, and God's mercy, and our prayers are for God's will and action. But you know, sometimes we *hear* that if you just believe HARD enough or

you just pray HARD enough everything will work out just fine... Your prayers will be answered.

But sometimes regardless of our efforts, they're not. Sometimes, what we wanted just doesn't happen. Sometimes, in spite of our striving, things just take their natural course... And sometimes "*things just taking their natural course*" – or "*not working out the way they were planned*" -- gets blamed on our lack of faith or lack of prayer.

I guess my own personal experience of that would be after the burial service for my two sisters. I was just a kid in a wheelchair and a body cast, sitting across the table from our "pastor" with my dad – my mom was still in the hospital and this guy had his bible open -- and was making it plain – even to a 8 year old – that it was lack of faith and diligence in church matters that caused this tragedy to happen to my family. My dad – with remarkable restraint - asked the man to leave and hasn't had much to do with church ever since.

Now, don't get me wrong, I don't think that guy was trying to be harmful or cruel – he was probably well intentioned but I also think he was just a little mixed up about what causes miracles. You see, I believe he really thought faith makes miracles happen – that miracles had some relationship to quality of faith and quantity of prayer – and practice of religion. And of course the implication of that is, if something bad happens – or if you are sick and getting sicker, it must be YOUR fault. You simply need to pray harder – believe more – give more or whatever... **But of course, that's just hogwash.**

As always, we try to work things around so that we can appear to be in control of our lives. We do that because it's easier to do than owning up to the fact that every breath we take is a free surprise from God, and a random one at that. Faith does not work miracles, God does. To concentrate on the strength of our own belief is to practice magic. To concentrate on the strength of God is to practice faith. And that's not just playing with words. *It's the difference in believing that our fate is in our own hands or our fate is in God's hands.* You see, **God** --- not faith -- works miracles.

And you know, often the miracle worked is a miracle worked in our own hearts: Often the miracle worked is the willingness in our own hearts to trust God, with the outcome in spite of what appears to be a situation not to our liking. Often the result of our prayer is to become prepared to accept God's action or apparent lack of action knowing that he knows best.

You see, it's always a miracle when we understand that God is God and we are not.

In Jesus' name

Amen