

Walking Miracles

Sermon, May 30, 2021

Texts: Joshua 6:1-5; Acts 3:1-10

For eleven years, 2001 through late 2011, my usual Monday through Friday morning routine was to get up at 5:00 A.M., walk the dog around the block (*our neighborhood block is a one-mile loop*), get the children's lunches packed, do some laundry, cook and eat my breakfast, read the newspaper ... and then, since it was still dark before I'd wake the kids, feed them and drive them to school, I would then get down on my knees and pray God would cause the sun to rise that day.

No, I really didn't do that last part.

I knew the chances were pretty good that if I got up, the sun was going to make it, too. G.K. Chesterton has written the sun rises every morning not so much because of the natural laws of the universe, but because God commands it to get up and "*Do it again!*"¹ God loves routine, He delights in the routine, and He has built consistent and faithful routine into the very warp and woof of this created order. In fact, I believe He is glorified in the faithful performance of the routine. All creation is a testimony to God's almost-preoccupation with saying, "*Do it again!*" The same is true as He observes your life. How many days, months, even years have you spent doing the same routine thing day in and day out, faithfully getting up, going to work or school, doing laundry, paying the bills. cleaning the house, tending the lawn, buying groceries, taking care of people you love ... and nothing extraordinary happened that day, nothing particularly life changing. It was just another day of faithful, dutiful, ordinary, responsible but rather uneventful living; you just sort of followed the sun on its course until you, too, went down at the end of the day. Well, the next morning it is a delighted God who smiles at you and says, "*Get up and do it again!*"

Throughout those eleven years, my dog Solomon was my constant, exuberant example and inspiration to delight in the routine. Early in the morning, as soon as he would hear the first footfall of my getting out of bed (*he was trained to stay downstairs*), I would hear him wiggle and whine and whimper and fairly jump out of his skin with anticipation. He also used to do this remarkable thing of repeatedly leaping his 80+ pound body straight up, four or five feet into the air, and landing with a house-shaking "whump" ... my children got so used to it they would just sleep right through as the dog went "*walking and leaping and praising Dad.*" As Solomon aged, after age ten or so, he stopped leaping. Even then, though, he'd still get so excited and so happy to start another routine day walking our same routine one-mile walk in the dark, around the same routine neighborhood, as if to say, "*YIPPEE! I get to go out there and walk with my Master again!*" We did that just about EVERY DAY, seven days a week, for over eleven years; almost up until the day he died (*the day before he passed away, he just walked to the end of the driveway and lay down*). I did the basic math; minus vacations and snow days, that's (*conservatively*) four thousand-plus miles of walking around the same neighborhood block (*I didn't fully include the evening or the occasional afternoon walks we often took!*), and each and every time, his enthusiasm never dimmed ... until that final week or so of his life. Would that we could get so happily exuberant about the routine, ordinary, yet wonderful privilege it is to get up and go out to faithfully walk side by side with our Lord and Master, day in and day out, in the routine courses of our everyday lives. And if I may mix metaphors a bit, I saw something of the delight of God reflected in His creation of that wonderful dog ... a God who exuberantly delights in seeing each of us faithfully getting up day in and day out to go out there and walk with Him again and again and again.

Our Scripture lessons have a common theme of walking ... walking *miracles*, actually. The reading from Acts is about a crippled man who is told to get up and walk in the name of Jesus, and as he struggles to do so, he is miraculously healed ... and as the old Sunday School song put it, he went "*walking and leaping and praising God.*" The reading from Joshua is about the Israelites who are told in the name of God to get up and go walking, and in doing so are miraculously victorious over a foreboding Jericho. Both are examples of the miraculous power of walking as a response of faith ... literal, ordinary, routine walking ... accomplishing extraordinary results.

You know the story of Jericho. It was the first obstacle, the first battle the Hebrews faced as they came to the Promised Land after forty years of wilderness walking, a huge city with enormous, impenetrable stone walls. The Lord gave Joshua the battle plan: "*Take all the soldiers, put seven priests with seven trumpets in front and walk in a circle around the city. Do it again the next day. And the day after that. On the day*

¹ The full quote, from G.K. Chesterton's *Orthodoxy*: "*Because children have abounding vitality, because they are in spirit fierce and free, therefore they want things repeated and unchanged. They always say, "Do it again"; and the grown-up person does it again until he is nearly dead. For grown-up people are not strong enough to exult in monotony. But perhaps God is strong enough to exult in monotony. It is possible that God says every morning, "Do it again" to the sun; and every evening, "Do it again" to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. It may be that He has the eternal appetite of infancy; for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father is younger than we.*"

after THAT, do it seven times ... on the seventh day walk around the city seven times. Then the priests are to let it rip on their trumpets, the soldiers are to scream their heads off, and the walls will come tumbling down, and you can just head on into town."

Break apart these impenetrable, imposing walls by just ... walking? Walking around and around in circles, going over the same old ground again and again for a solid week and then just letting loose with a lot of yelling and noise? That may sound a bit like what happens at our denomination's General Assembly every other year, but how will this accomplish anything here at Jericho? Imagine what must have been going on in the minds of the soldiers as day after day, they just walked, walked, walked in circles. **Forty years** they have been walking around in the wilderness anticipating this moment when they would finally enter the Promised Land. But when the big day comes, what are their orders? *"Walk around some more!"* Maybe the soldiers were thinking, *"We're just walking around out here! Why can't we just charge ahead? Why all this walking in circles, going over the same old ground, again and again and again?"*

You know how that feels. You want to do something meaningful, you get a sense of mission; you may be perhaps thinking God has even called you to do something great. But you find so much of life is caught up in ... **routine**. I would say many of us spend a lot of life just walking in circles thinking we're not getting anywhere or doing much of anything significant. Our days are filled with so much routine, so much "stuff," so many things that need to be done ... good things, to be sure, but so many seemingly unrelated to anything great and noble and lasting. But you know, though, more often than not, that's what God calls us to. *Routine* faithfulness. Doing all that we do faithfully and well. *(As a related side note, there are so many things we'd probably like to fix, straighten out, change for the better in this world around us, but it starts with our routine, consistent faithfulness and goodness in all things large and small ... and I believe more is affected and effected by the dogged integrity and routine faithfulness of trustworthy people who simply live their lives consistently and well.)* In fact, being able to do the routine consistently and faithfully is a real blessing and an honorable call in and of itself. People who are doggedly faithful in routine matters are worthy of our trust and confidence! And people who aren't conscientiously faithful in routine matters ... well, they are worthy of our concern, even our pity.

If you ever think closely about the ordinary, the routine, you just can't take it for granted. Having hearts that routinely beat, legs able to walk, having loved ones to look after, homes to take care of, the ability and the time and the luxury to purchase and cook and eat a variety of "routine" foods ... these and endless more "routine" things are all wonderful gifts from a generous God, gifts not everyone can enjoy. For example, most of us don't start out the morning hoping our heart valves will keep working. We take it for granted; it's so ordinary. We assume the heart will run itself while we concern ourselves with other things. But the routines of the heart are a great blessing; just ask anyone with heart disease! The routine is a gift. God calls us to the privilege of faithful and obedient and at-times mundane walking, walking, walking as part of His divine plan *(as the prophet Micah expressed it so succinctly, "And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."* And, as He promised Joshua, this routine can indeed work miracles. That is our hope! Our job is simply to be faithful, and witness the sacred ways God uses our routine faithfulness. *"And on the seventh day, Joshua led his soldiers around Jericho seven times. After the seventh time, the priests blew the trumpets, the soldiers shouted, and the walls did fall, and the Hebrews charged ahead and took the city."*

From time to time in our daily, faithful, routine walking, the miraculous does breaks through, and does so dramatically. But those miraculous moments are so few and far between that we should not base our joy or our faith or our contentment on them! I've learned a life long lesson from my dog ... joy and contentment and fulfillment are to be found in simply walking, walking, walking with my Master. More often than not the holy is found in the ordinary routines, in ordinary things done well. Oswald Chambers has written, *"We think that we have been called to do exceptional things with our lives, but we have not. We have been called to do ordinary things in exceptional ways."* We have been called to do ordinary things extraordinarily well. Edmund Burke wrote, *"No man makes a greater mistake than he who does nothing only because it is not everything."*

One final note: I find it delightful God took two things the Israelites were good at and called them to exercise these two things for His glory. After all, what were they were good at? First, they were really good at walking. What have they been doing the last forty years, but walk around in circles throughout the Sinai wilderness? Walking around learning what it means to depend on the grace of God sustaining them day in and day out? And what else were they good at? They were also good at complaining! Loudly. We read that often in the Exodus stories. God even took *that* "ability" and sanctified it, using it for His glorious purposes! He used their cranky, bellowing, yelling voices to effect victory as the soldiers let loose with forty years of pent-up frustration and yelled for all they were worth! God called them to do what they really already knew how to do, and to do it well; He called them to routine faithfulness in what they are gifted and experienced in doing, and He magnified the power of their skills to perform the miraculous. *(The following was edited out on the spot due to time constraints; I include it here: "How like God. God took the shepherd David, and the skills David honed as he walked around the pastures with his sheep, and makes him a giant-killing champion and eventual king. The skills David learned from the routines of shepherding, the ordinary skills he learned extraordinarily well, prepared him to be God's mighty shepherd king. In the New Testament, Jesus takes fishermen ... and uses their honed skills to make them fishers of men." – end of excerpt.)*

So *(to semi-quote my dog)*, YIPPEE! Let's count it a great joy and privilege to get up each day and go walking with our Master again ... and watch His grace fill our ordinary moments with extraordinary blessing.