

More Miracles for Steve Dague

The Rev. Mark Sherwindt, Pastor
Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church
Good News of Easter 3: April 6, 2008

What a week it was, and what a week it's been! I'm talking about last Sunday, and the aftermath of joy for Steve Dague and his family, and for us. I trust that most of you have seen this news in the newsletter; but if you weren't there when we heard the news and made the announcement, we raised over \$20,000 in just 29 days! The cover of April's edition of *The Zion Herald* said it all: God's amazing grace accomplishing great things, right before our eyes, using us in the process, using us as the process. When we shared this news at the dessert reception last Sunday, Dan Dague's jaw dropped with stunned silence. Dan is Steve's older brother. Darlene, Steve's wife, couldn't wait to run up to the hospital to tell him the news that very night: \$20,000 in 29 days! Let's face it. We amazed even ourselves. What a boost this gave Steve in his drive to get better, to get stronger, to work on his movement and his mobility.

Sometimes you can tell. You just know it, that you are becoming a part of something bigger than yourself, something that's much bigger than you thought. That's what happened last week. That's what happened with the Steve Dague Fund, when it took on a life of its own and became something bigger than any of us imagined. Last Sunday was quite a day and quite a night, for the Dagues, and for Zion. It started, of course, with Sunday morning when I was absolutely certain about the point of our Gospel Lesson, which was the story of the doubting Thomas, who devised a proof to establish a link - solid, decisive, and indisputable - between the Risen Lord and the Crucified Jesus. "Reach out your hand and touch the print of the nails. Feel the wounds in my side. Do not doubt, but believe - where believing is not the absence of proof but based on the evidence - that I, your Lord, am the revelation of God." (John 20: 27) The power of God's love and the promise of God's future was there in his midst. The Crucified Jesus, complete with nail prints and all, now raised from the dead, was, is, and ever shall be the revelation of God.

No sooner did I insist on that relation of identity in John's Gospel last week when this week with Luke's Gospel, picking up on the same day when Jesus' disciples were told that he was risen, we see a different picture. As indisputable as was the visible link between the Crucified Jesus and the Risen Lord for Thomas, all you need do today is turn that upside down and inside out, and that's how opaque and unrecognizable was that link for the two disciples who were walking with a stranger on the road to Emmaus. I've heard the explanations. The light was bad. They were so distraught with grief that they weren't paying attention. Jesus was probably wearing clothing they didn't recognize, which obscured the markings of the crucifixion. More imaginatively speaking, perhaps Jesus knew the old *Jedi* technique of concealing his identity through the power of the force. Maybe he was a prototype for the ancient *Clingon* art of cloaking, although that was more about being invisible than unrecognizable, and I'm not sure Jesus would want to be a type of *Clingon* yet to come.

All kidding aside, the point is that the disciples walked with this traveler for hours. They talked about everything under the sun in great detail. They stopped for a bible

study along the way. But despite all this time, discussion, and debate, despite being fully engaged by this interaction and conversation, they didn't recognize that it was Jesus until they shared in the breaking of the bread later that evening. Last week it was clear. All the physical evidence was provided with the presence of the Risen Lord - the nail prints, the slash of the sword in his side. The Jesus whom they knew for three years, the Jesus whom they followed into the darkness of Gethsemane, and from there into the sham of a trial that led to his crucifixion and death, was the same Jesus they encountered when they were huddled together behind closed doors. In stark contrast, this week that connection of identity is about as clear as mud, providing a real challenge for folks who feel the need to tie all the loose ends together so that all the evidence points in the same direction to a single portrait of the Risen Lord. Since I am not one of those readers requiring that every detail in all four gospels fit together in perfect harmony, I can say with full confidence that as clear as I was last week in understanding the point that John's Gospel was making with Thomas' proof, even so I am equally clear this week about the point that Luke's Gospel is making with this interesting ending to his two-volume Gospel narrative, which is clearly proclaiming a connection of continuity between the person of Jesus and the life of the Church. That's the miracle that becomes so clear in the breaking of the bread. That's the point of recounting how their eyes were opened, and Jesus' presence turned a common meal into Holy Communion. Luke doesn't explain how Jesus was really present there with them; but it is clear that Cleopas and his friend were saying more than that they simply remembered Jesus at that moment. It was more than a *déjà vu* moment all over again, just like *the good old days* when they used to break bread with Jesus, as in three days prior on Maundy Thursday at their last supper together. Their eyes were opened and they knew they were in the presence of something much bigger than anything they had imagined. The only word for it was *resurrection*, which, for the record, was not a word that described your ordinary, run-of-the-mill experience of life as we know it. It describes something outside-the-box, where the ordinary draws us into a moment where we encounter the extraordinary, not by our design or of our making, but by the real presence of our Lord inviting us to enjoy communion with the holy. For Luke, it is not about explaining the mystery, but entering into the miracle. Luke is telling us that this happens with communion. This happens in the church. It is not just a state of mind, but an encounter with the Risen Lord through such ordinary elements as bread and wine. We'd like to can it so that we can control it. We'd like to turn it into some magic words so that we can make it happen when we say so. We'd like to turn it into a formula so that we can sell it. There is no doubt that Christianity has often been reduced to a marketable product, promoted on television, advertised on radio, packaged in books and sold over the counter. But that is not what Luke is talking about. The Risen Lord is personally present in the celebration of Holy Communion and in life of the church. Something is going on here that cannot be packaged. It is bigger than what we thought we started. It is bigger than anything we might have hoped for. It's like last week's Benefit Concert and special collection. It simply became something bigger than what we had hoped or even imagined. "Didn't our hearts burn, when our eyes were opened, and we knew that Jesus is alive. God's love lives. He is risen!" I'm sure that's exactly what Darlene said when she raced up to Edwin Shaw to share the Good News with Steve. Jaws dropped. Hearts fluttered. Hopes soared. Faith flourished. Jesus is alive! God's love lives! He is risen! And all God's people agreed. "He is risen, indeed. Alleluia!" Let's try that again. He is risen! He is risen, indeed. Alleluia! Amen