

The Reverend Marjo Anderson

Narrative Lectionary 2.35 – Easter 5
Acts 3.1-10

10 May 2020
Salem, Bridgeport

“Answers Amidst the Pandemic”

Answers amidst the pandemic. Answers hid from our eyes. Answers in disguise.

Sometimes praying feels like playing the lottery.

Occasionally there seem to be top winners – like the man in today’s story, the man, who crippled from birth,
ended up leaping and dancing and praising God.

And fairly often we or someone we know wins something –
their cancer goes into remission, or they get a new job, or their house sells,
or their child or grandchild gets into the college of their choice.

But then there are those long stretches when it seems that none of our prayers have winning numbers.

Yet maybe they do.

Maybe we’re just not checking the right numbers,

Maybe the answers are right in front of us, and we don’t even realize it.

Sometimes the answers are hid from our eyes.

Sometimes the answers are in disguise.

Let me tell you a story....

Meghan felt so wiped, so tired, so exhausted, as she struggled under the weight
of the pain of the past, the problems of the present, and the fears of the future.

The accumulated weight was more than she could bear
and her body threatened to crumple to the ground at any moment
under the dead weight of its own lifeless matter.

She was so depressed she couldn’t bring herself to do anything except crawl into bed.

Ever since the pandemic struck her life had begun to fall apart.

She was not only a new teacher, she’d had to figure out how to do her work online
with virtually no help from the administration.

The learning curve had been steep and extremely stressful but she had managed.

But now that she had mastered the basics and the adrenaline rush was over, she had crashed into depression.

Her husband, Steve, a fitness trainer who had his own business, suddenly had no clients and no income.

They had bought a new house just a few months before
and they had counted on both their incomes to pay the mortgage.

Her depression had descended into despondency.

And not only was she having to deal with all this stress, she had no one to turn to.

Her best friend had gotten married and moved away in January

and was so busy now with her life as an ICU nurse that she had no time for Meghan.

Meghan had always had a strong faith, but lately it seemed as if God had abandoned her.

And today, depression and despondency had descended into deep despair.

Steve had fallen asleep on the sofa and as she lay in bed, curled into a fetal position, alone,
she could hear the devil whispering withering words in her ear:

“This quarantine could go on for 6, 12, 18, months or more.

You might lose everything.

You might as well give up now.”

And then she heard another voice, God’s voice:

“Didn’t you want a job where you could work from home?
Didn’t you want a job where you were your own boss?
Didn’t you say you wished you had time to write?
Didn’t you want to get a first book written so you could leave teaching?
Didn’t you want to have more time with your husband?”

“I was listening, you know”, says God.
“Maybe I created this whole pandemic just for you –
and for all my other children who asked for their lives to change.”

“You wanted your life to be different. And that means it can’t be the same.
I’ve stripped off your old clothes and handed you new ones. Put them on.
I’ve picked you up and set you down in front of a new doorway. Walk through it.
I’ve set your feet on a new path. Move forward.
I’ve promised to provide for your every need. Put down all that baggage you’re carrying.
I know the deepest desires of your heart, but you won’t find them behind you or beside you. They lay ahead.”

“Everything that is happening to you is in answer to your prayers.
You wanted to leave Egypt; you wanted to be free; you wanted to get to the promised land.
I have taken you out of Egypt; I have freed you from your bonds; I have set you upon your journey.
Keep an eye on your dreams and walk towards them, but remember it’s just one step at a time.
Don’t be in a hurry – the promised land isn’t ready for you yet and you’re not ready for it.
Every step you take is one of purpose and value.
The world is a beautiful place, and you will never pass this way again. Enjoy the journey.
It is as important as the destination.”

“You’re tired, Meghan, so sleep. Rest in the safety of my arms. I’ve got you.
And tomorrow you’ll remember what I’ve said.”

Ever since the pandemic had struck, it had seemed to Megan
that her prayers weren’t being answered, that they hadn’t been winning numbers,
but as it turned out she was wrong.
She’d been checking the wrong numbers. The answers were there after all.
They’d simply been hid from her eyes. Answers in disguise.

What about you?
Maybe in this time of pandemic, God seems far off, not listening,
and prayers seem to be like losing lottery tickets.
But I believe that God is here; I believe God is listening; and here is what I believe that God is saying:
“Maybe I created this whole pandemic – or maybe I didn’t – but believe me, I am using it
for you - and for all my other children who asked for their lives to change.

“You wanted your life to be different? That means it can’t be the same.
I’ve stripped off your old clothes and handed you new ones. Put them on.
I’ve picked you up and set you down in front of a new doorway. Walk through it.
I’ve set your feet on a new path. Move forward.
I’ve promised to provide for your every need. Put down all that baggage you’re carrying.
I know the deepest desires of your heart, but you won’t find them behind you or beside you. They lay ahead.”
Everything that is happening to you is in answer to your prayers.”

“Each day is my gift to you, each hour is brimming over with opportunity, each minute, full of possibility.
And even when you don’t realize it, every moment is an answer to prayer.” Thanks be to God! **Amen**