

Morning Assembly _ The Miracle Worker

30th November, 2015

A few weeks ago, I was invited to watch a play in the North District Town Hall in Sheung Shui. The play was directed by a former teacher of St. Paul's College, Mr. Hardy Choi, who happened to be the director of our musical in the 120th anniversary concert. You can still find his name on the poster next to our Conference Room on 4/F. The play that I watched was a 1-hour condensed version of a famous play "The Miracle Worker" by William Gibson and it was performed in Cantonese for high school students in the North District.

The play "Miracle Worker" is about the story of Helen Keller. She contracted a disease that might have been scarlet fever or meningitis when she was only 19 months old which left her blind, deaf and consequently mute. Out of pity, her parents badly spoilt her and at the age of six she became a wild and unruly girl throwing tantrums terrorizing the whole family. However, the main theme of the play is really concerning her governess, Annie Sullivan, who was persistent enough to help Helen Keller to make sense of the world by teaching her language through hand signals. Hence the title of the play "The Miracle Worker" is actually referring to Annie Sullivan, who made such a breakthrough in Helen Keller's life. In 1904, at the age of 24, Keller graduated from Radcliffe, becoming the first deaf and blind person to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree.

The story of Helen Keller is certainly very inspiring. It is an excellent illustration that character is built through hardship and suffering. As Helen Keller so succinctly put it, "Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved." It is also a good reminder to us who are in the teaching profession that we can have a lasting impact on our students.

The play reminds me of old Bartimaeus, the beggar sitting by the roadside in the city of Jericho in the Gospel of Mark. Bartimaeus had been sitting there for many years and one day he heard that Jesus was coming with a large crowd. "Jesus, Son of David, have

mercy on me!” he cried at the top of his voice. While others rebuked him and told him to be quiet, he kept on shouting out for Jesus to heal him. “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked. The blind man said, “Rabbi, I want to see!” “Go,” said Jesus, “your faith has healed you.” Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

The Bible is full of miracles performed by Jesus and we see Jesus healing the sick, helping the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the mute to speak and the lame to walk. Sceptics often say that miracles like these are not possible and conclude that the Bible is fictional and untrue. People often try to rationalise these miracles and say that it is unscientific to believe in miracles in this day and age of modern technology.

Yet deep down in their heart, when they are in dire straits, they cry out to whatever god that they believe in for miracles to happen. They want miracles to happen when they are in grave trouble and sometimes, in some inexplicable ways, miracles do happen.

Miracles do not have to be about divine intervention. For Helen Keller, her governess Annie Sullivan was the miracle worker. Single-handedly and with dogged determination, she transformed a spoilt, unruly, blind, deaf and mute Helen Keller into a prolific author, an outspoken activist for women’s right to vote, labour rights, and other causes. Helen Keller’s story is a miracle made possible by the human hand. Not all miracles need divine intervention.

Jesus’ miracles, no matter how fictional they may appear to you, are recorded in the Gospels for a purpose: they are the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. In Isaiah 35:5, it was written, “Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. Then the lame will leap like a deer, And the tongue of the mute will shout for joy.” However, we can also look at Jesus’ miracles from two levels. Physically, Jesus healed Bartimaeus so that he could see again. Figuratively, Jesus’ healing helped him see spiritually the salvation of God.

It reminds me of that famous verse from the hymn “Amazing Grace” by John Newton.

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind but now I see

John Newton was not physically blind but God gradually helped him see how wretched he was in the slave trade and he began to see and understand the grace of God.

Last time in assembly I talked about talents. God considers you valuable and He gives each one of you some gifts, each according to his abilities. To Helen Keller, she could have complained that God was really unfair to her. He took away her ability to see, to hear and to speak altogether when she was only 19 months old. She was deprived of all the essential senses for her to explore, to make sense of and to enjoy the world. She was trapped inside of own dark and silent world. Did God give her any talents? Yes, He gave her intelligence and the ability to learn. When she used her talents well, more talents were added to her.

Let me finish this speech with a few quotes from Helen Keller and I hope you will find them inspiring.

“The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision”

“Everything has its wonders, even darkness and silence, and I learn, whatever state I may be in, therein to be content”

“The most beautiful things in this world cannot be seen or even heard, but must be felt with the heart”

Yuen Dick Yan, Dennis

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