

May 13th Mid-Week Devotion:

I write this message to you the night before we are gathering (just a handful of us from each congregation) to discuss our plans for summer worship and guidelines/expectations for returning to church in-person. In order to get this mailed out in time we will not have met but I will be sure to get the information to you as soon as we are able.

As usual, my thoughts and prayers have been with everyone from Perley Parish and I pray that you continue to stay safe and well. This week, the story I am going to share with you is about things happening that we may consider differently if we look at them through a different perspective.

While we still continue to be monitoring the spread of the virus and still continue to distance ourselves from others – I think this story may help us to see a few things in a different light.

The story is called Avalanche and is written by a gentleman named Robert G. Allen.

It was our dream cabin-- 10,000 square feet of luxurious space over-looking a majestic waterfall on the backside of Mount Timpanogos, near the slopes of Robert Redford's famous Sundance Ski Resort. It took my wife and I several years to design, plan, build and furnish it.

But it took only 10 seconds to destroy it.

I remember the afternoon as if it were yesterday. Thursday, February 13th, 1986, the day before our ninth anniversary. It had snowed about 40 inches that day. Still, my wife braved the weather for the 30-minute ride up the canyon from our home in Provo to visit our newly completed mountain home.

Taking our six-year-old son, Aaron, she left early that afternoon, stopping on the way to buy some ingredients for a cake to celebrate our special day. I was to join her later and bring Aimee, our nine-year-old daughter, and hunter, our youngest son.

My first hint of danger came at about 3:00 PM with a call from the Sundance ski patrol.

"There's a problem at your cabin. You'd better come immediately."

They gave no more details. Although I was behind deadline in finishing up a project, I left my computer and dashed up the canyon on snow-clogged roads. When I arrived at the ski-resort, the director of the resort and his staff greeted me with somber looks on their faces.

"There's been a catastrophe at the cabin. We think your wife and son were there. Jump in my

four-wheel drive. Let's go."

The cabin was adjacent to the main Sundance ski slope and was accessible only by a narrow, winding mountain road. As we frantically raced up the road, the high snow banks on either side made it seem as if we were winding through a labyrinth. As we rounded a curve in the road we met another vehicle coming down the narrow roadway. Both of us slammed on our brakes as we skidded into each other, with minor damage to both vehicles. After a brief exchange of information, we continued our race up the narrow road until the copper roof of the cabin came into sight in the distance.

I spotted my wife and son in the roadway surrounded by several members of the ski patrol. As I jumped out of the vehicle and ran toward her, she pointed to the trees above the cabin. I was shocked by what I saw.

The swath of a monster avalanche had blasted down the mountainside, leaving massive trees snapped and broken in its wake like match sticks. I glanced again at the cabin and could now see how the avalanche had ripped through our mountain home. In seconds it had blown out all the windows and piled tons and tons of snow into our huge living room, collapsing all the floors and destroying our dreams. Outside, our carefully selected furniture lay smashed to bits in the snow. It was a scene of shocking devastation, I shall never forget.

The ski patrol hustled us out of the avalanche zone quickly, as new avalanches threatened. We returned home, dazed, stunned, in shock. For month after, I wondered why we had been so unlucky as to lose our beautiful mountain home. Why did God allow such things to happen?

The story could end here. But then you wouldn't know of the miracle that happened that day. As it was, I didn't discover the miracle until eight months later.

At a business meeting, a colleague asked me a seemingly simple question.

"Did your wife ever tell you that my wife and your wife almost had an accident on the road to your cabin on the day of your avalanche?"

"No," I replied. "What happened?"

"Well, my wife and our boys were staying at our Sundance cabin. Because of the heavy snow, they decided to leave and come back home. Before leaving the cabin, one of the boys suggested that they offer a prayer for a safe trip home. They bowed their heads and offered a brief prayer

and then started down the narrow road.

“Your wife, driving up the road, saw my wife and the boys in our Suburban. But when my wife slammed on her brakes, the car wouldn’t stop. It skidded down the slick mountain road gathering speed.

There was nothing she could do to stop it. Finally, at the last moment before the two vehicles were to crash into each other, she turned the wheel, slamming the front side of the Suburban into the snow bank on one side of the road while the rear of the vehicle slammed into the bank on the other side...virtually blocking your wife from proceeding up the road. They tried for almost an hour to get the Suburban unstuck and finally had to get help from the ski resort.”

“That’s amazing,” I said. “My wife never told me.”

We chuckled about the “accident” and parted company. Then the force of what he had just revealed hit me. If it hadn’t been for this near “accident” my wife and son would most certainly have been killed in the avalanche!

I’ve often thought about that “accident” in the roadway. I imagine my wife sitting there in frustration as the Suburban blocker her way to the cabin. I can see my friend’s wife at the scene, embarrassed by the whole situation. I see her boys upset and confused wondering if God really hears prayers.

At the time, everyone viewed this incredible avalanche and its destruction as a complete disaster. And yet, with perspective, it was obvious that they all unknowingly participated in a miracle.

Now I am slower to judge the “disasters” that occur from time to time in my life. Eventually, as more information becomes available, many of them turn out to be miracles in the making. When “accidents” happen, I try to ask myself, “What miracle is God fashioning out of this misfortune?”

Instead of wondering, “why me, God?” I simply say, “Thank you, God.”

Then I wait until all the evidence rolls in.

We have all heard stories like this, if something hadn’t happened to derail what was to happen – the outcome would’ve been very different. It’s a timing thing – a timing issue - in which a miracle or a wonderful different outcome takes place.

So, did I pick this story because we are all waiting and wanting that miracle in our lives? Sure, right?? No, I did not. Yes, I'd love a miracle but what I really love is what has been taking place the last 6 weeks or so in our world.

Clearly, there are thousands and thousands of people dying from this horrible virus. That of course is not what I am talking about. I pray that the world will find a cure and a vaccine and the dying will end soon and the world will heal and the life that we have will be new and vibrant again.

What I am referencing though is the fact that although there is a lot of hardship, and unknowns with all that is going on right now, there is also some amazing things that are happening because of it.

On a daily basis – I hear of people stepping up and doing things to help others. I saw how people stepped and donated and donated and donated matching funds for the Perley Parish Food Shelf. I saw how the kids of Faith Lutheran in Wolverton decided that we should all be sharing the sunshine – and how our kids shone like lights in the darkness and sang the song to share with others. I see each day pictures of families – moms and dads and kids and dogs and cats – all spending amazing and unending (I'm sure that's what it feels like some days) together. I see how all of the world has had to take a moment and sit and think about what they are doing and how they have been doing things. I see how we have all noticed (and greatly appreciated) those that do and complete their jobs to provide and care for others – the medical personnel, the teachers (wow they do so much for our kids don't they?) the grocery store workers, the gas station employees, the pizza delivery guys – it's really made us take a look at things and understand how all of us are connected.

What I have also realized is that people are looking for God right now – our numbers of views for our services are just amazing and it's not just us. All of my pastor friends and church peeps mention that they are reaching many more people than they ever have in the pews before. That's a miracle in itself – as we continue to see the numbers in attendance and our membership numbers decrease year after year in our churches – these last few weeks have found the church and the Word being checked out and viewed more than ever. God is good!

Jeremiah 29:11-14

¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. ¹² Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. ¹⁴ I will be found by you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back from captivity.

Do I think that we live in captivity? Well not physically but I do think that we become a society that requires us to live in a world of crazy commitment, a world of crazy responsibilities and a world of crazy busy lives. In this verse God is telling us that He has got us. He is here to hear us and give us hope and be our future. He is with us as we fight this pandemic, as we continue to gather apart, and as we look to a future, that will indeed be different, but a future I surely hope and pray will find us continuing to be aware of what is and isn't important. Let us hope and pray that we too will know and realize when that evidence rolls in.

Let us pray:

Gracious and Loving God, oh how we long to gather and be together again. We look to a world that is free from pandemics and is free from being separated. Help us all to realize and remember that we are never alone. You, our Lord, are with us in the good and the bad and knowing and trusting in your love and promises are the best ways in order for us to find the new perspective in what is happening each-and-every day. We thank you for this opportunity to share our time and our lives with each other – even if it is done through a zoom meeting or a facetime phone call or a note in the mail. We pray that you will continue to help those that are looking for a remedy and a healing path for those that are ill. We pray that you be with all those who continue to put themselves in harms way to care for those who need care. We pray that you help us all to see the light in your love and the assurance that you have plans for us – even if we aren't sure what they are – you have it all figured out. All of this and whatever else you may see that we may need Lord, we look for you to take care of for us. In your loving name, Amen.