

“Miracles and Mulligans”

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Congregational Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts
May 1, 2022 – Third Sunday of Easter
Revelation 5:11-14; John 21:1-19

Springtime is here, and while it's still a bit chilly outside some days, it's warm enough to resume many of the outdoor sports that can only be played in the warmer weather, such as the sport I talked about in our children's message, baseball. One of the sports that I enjoy playing in the warmer months is golf. More accurately, I should say that I enjoy hitting golf balls at the driving range. While I enjoy actual game of golf as well, I'm quite bad at it, and I feel badly for anyone golfing a round with me as they have to endure hours of dealing with a player who requires many shots to go the same distance that they can go in just a couple.

Fortunately for me and others who golf as I do, there are couple of wonderful devices that can help us from feeling discouraged by our poor play. One of these is the mulligan, which is a do over, a second chance to hit a ball from the same spot after hitting a poor shot. While not allowed by the official rules, the mighty mulligan has helped me on more than one occasion to retain a small bit of my self-esteem after driving a ball deep into the woods or right into the middle of a pond by getting another chance to take a less risky or more controlled shot that stays inbounds and moves me at least a little closer to the hole.

Another device that has helped me to successfully endure a round of golf on more than one occasion is the miracle. I know for sure that miracles do exist because I see many of them over the course of a round, when, after one of my commonly wild or otherwise bad swings, the ball -- somehow, miraculously -- manages to go in the right direction.

Too often, it is only because of miracles and mulligans that I can make it to the end of a round of golf without feeling downright discouraged and ready to give up on the sport entirely. And so I am grateful for the gifts of miracles and mulligans!

I am thankful for these gifts not just golf, but in life, for in life, we are blessed by God's grace in the form of many miracles and mulligans. Today's lesson from the gospel of John tells us of just this, that God acts, working miracles to provide for

us, and that God continues to bless us and give us new opportunities to use what we have been given even if we've made mistakes in the past with what has been entrusted to our care.

After his resurrection, Jesus could have abandoned his disciples, just as they had all abandoned him in his time of trial, when their friendship was needed most. He could have been done with Simon Peter, who had just sworn that not only was he not a disciple of Jesus, he didn't even know him. Jesus could have just let the fishermen quietly return to their lives of fishing, letting the discouraged and downhearted disciples go back to doing what they did before they gave up their nets to follow Jesus.

But Christ loved his disciples too much to leave them alone. And so he came to them, provided a miraculous, abundant catch for them, when, after their own efforts, they could catch nothing. He gave them all a second chance at being united with him, offering them fellowship through breaking bread and sharing a meal on the beach. And the biggest mulligan of all was offered to Peter, who was not only forgiven for his three denials, but was graciously named -- three times -- as the shepherd of Christ's sheep. He was not only restored, but elevated.

This is what God does with us as well! When we find ourselves in need of a miracle, God provides. When we feel ashamed of our brokenness and guilty of our errant ways that have hurt us, those we love, and our loving Creator, God forgives. God restores us and God elevates us, regardless of how we have failed before.

My friends, this is what it means to be an Easter people: Just as Christ was restored to life after the grave, the people of Christ are restored to life after their time in the tomb. Life is yours; embrace it! Forgiveness is yours; receive it! Fellowship with God and others is yours; enjoy it! A renewed calling to share this hopeful message is yours; heed it!

Today and always, may we all add our voices to the Alleluias being sung out by all the faithful who have gone before us and all of the earth's creatures now living as we respond to God's great grace with thanksgiving and praise. Amen.