This week, millions of people around the world were captivated by the heroic and daring rescue of the 12 boys and their football coach in Thailand. I’m sure many of you have also been following it on the news. Those 12 boys and their coach were trapped by the rising monsoon rain inside the cave for more than 18 days. It was truly a miracle that they were able to pull off such an unprecedent underwater cave rescue effort. Many, including some of the world’s finest underwater rescuers, thought this would be an impossible mission…but somehow, someway, they did it and it went better than anyone had expected.

 Unfortunately, as you know, there was one casualty that a retired Thai Navy SEAL lost his life while delivering oxygen tanks inside the cave. He was hailed as a fearless hero deep in everyone’s heart. Hopefully his heroic effort would inspire others, including us, to give what we have and to serve others better than ourselves.

 There was an ancient African proverb that says ***“it takes a village to raise a child!”*** How many of you have heard of it before? Well, in light of what happened out in Thailand, this phrase is multiplied twelvefold among the outpouring support and prayers received for this unimaginable rescue mission. **It took a “global village” to raise these 12 boys and a coach out of the cave!!!”** A tiny countryside village in the remote northern part of Thailand became the center of a global community with hundreds, if not thousands of expert divers, rescue workers, medical staff, military personnel, and countless other local villagers who volunteered to cook, to wash clothes, to set up tents and transport equipment, or even as simple as praying to Buddha for the boys’ safe return.

 Thailand, as you know, is a very religious country with approximately 95% of its population declaring themselves as practicing Buddhists. Many believed that Buddha was merciful in hearing their prayers throughout this whole ordeal. One of the key teachings of Buddha is that your family or your community is more important than your own life. We need one another just as the others need you. It’s a real community of sharing and self-less giving where one thinks of others before oneself. Everyone shares what they have and supplements with one another. No one is above the other when we set aside our earthly differences socially and economically.

 According to one popular Buddhist belief, ***“You only lose what you cling to. You cannot lose what you don’t have.”*** In other word, it is very difficult to not get used to the things that we have in our life; the things that help us grow and be what we are. To live a happy and content life is not only a blessing to oneself but it also benefits others. What we cherish on this earth belongs right where it is. We cannot take them with us…so let us do good with what we have for others.

Or how about this one, ***“When we meet real tragedy in life, we can react in two ways- Either by losing hope and falling into self-destructive habits or by using the challenge to find our inner strength.”* *“It is during our darkest moments that we must focus to see the light.”*** I believe these basic life principles of Buddha played a pivotal role among those global “villagers” who risked their own lives, by pitching in and doing whatever that was required in order to help a group of total strangers in need.

 In the passage that we just read, we have also witnessed a community of people pitching in and contributing their share for a common cause and struggle. The ancient Israelites, under the leadership of their new King David, were becoming an up and rising nation - a force to be reckoned with, among the neighboring nations. For years, they have been the underdogs being bullied by the neighboring kingdoms of the Assyria, the Babylon and others. But the tides now have turned, when David called for his people to humble their hearts and confess their sins before God, and returned their allegiance back to God once again and their prayers were answered.

 In our story today, we read how the Israelites were returning from their “mission impossible” – a battle against the mighty Philistines up north, who were physically much stronger and more militarily advanced. They never thought they would had a chance if not for their faith and trust in the LORD. As the soldiers were returning, the Israelites were in jubilation celebrating the defeat of the Philistines and presenting the Ark of the Covenant before the people in celebration.

 Now in order for us to understand the context a little better, let us remind ourselves what the Ark of the Covenant really was and its significance to the community of God’s people. According to the book of Exodus, the Ark of the Covenant was ordered to be built by Moses for the purpose of holding the tablets of the Ten Commandments. It was a rectangular wooden chest of about 52” long, 31” wide, and 31” tall. It was plated with gold with two golden cherubims on the outside and covered by a veil of animal skin or a blue cloth. Only the priests from the tribe of Levi were allowed to carry it or even touch it. Wherever the people went, even onto the battlefield, the Ark would always lead the way ahead of them about ½ a mile out. It was lifted high so people could see from behind, as we’ve seen from the conquest of Jericho.

 Inside the Ark, besides the two tablets of the Ten Commandment, there was the rod of Aaron (Moses’s brother), a jar of manna, and the very first Torah scroll as written down by Moses. When the Israelites came upon the Jordan River, they weren’t sure of how they were going to cross the river, so Joshua (who was the designated leader after Moses and Aaron) prayed and eventually ordered the ark to be hoisted up and over the river in order to keep it dry. Well, as it turned out, it didn’t need to. As the Levites who were carrying the Ark were about to step into the river, immediately the water from the river receded and the people were able to cross over to the other side on dry ground and eventually into the land that God had promised them.

 In the story that we read earlier, 30,000 men were returning from their battle, rejoicing, and being welcomed home after their defeat of the Philistines and as usual the Ark was the center-piece of the procession. Only the selected few priestly Levites were allowed to carry the Ark using the carrying poles, and never to touch the Ark or handle it improperly, or else one would mean a certain death.

 In the verses that we didn’t get to read earlier, a man by the name of Uzzah was struck down and killed right next to the Ark because an oxen had stumbled and he inadvertently touched the Ark as a non-Levite. It was a big No-No! It was an accident but nevertheless, it desecrated the Ark…Imagine how that scene must have looked like.

 After seeing how destructive and powerful the Ark can be and the expressed anger of God, David ordered to keep the Ark outside of Jerusalem until a later time when God calmed down his anger, while making sure that all the laws were followed accordingly and pleasing to God.

 As you would imagine, the transfer of the Ark into its proper place was a major undertaking and involved the entire village. This time, David made sure that only those priestly Levites were allowed to carry it, while others must remain distance far off, while they sang, danced and played various musical instruments in celebration, as the Ark processed. David made sacrifices and burnt offerings along the way while giving thanks to God. After the burnt offerings were being made, everyone received a fair portion of bread, meat, and cake to take home and share among others who were part of the “village”. No one was excluded. This incident went off without a hitch, thanks to the communal effort of the people.

 For more than 430 years from Moses to David, **the Ark of the Covenant served as a symbol of hope and an anchor of faith among the people of God.** The Israelites have kept their faith. Undoubtedly they have honored their tradition through those years. There have been times when the people abandoned their faith and hope. God rendered punishment for their sins and unfaithfulness. They have lost their vision and disappointed God while fallen into the hands of their enemies. But at the end, the people learned it the hard way that their God had not abandoned them, in spite of their many trials, challenges, and unfaithfulness. **God remained the same God who is faithful to the end among God’s own covenant people.**

 When it comes to carrying out God’s work and ministry today, it also takes a village of collective team effort in order to make things happen. **All hands must be on deck!!!** Keep in mind that no one person can do it all by himself or herself. We must share our collective gifts, talents, and resources with humility and grace without grumbling and complaints. Everybody ought to contribute our share for a common cause and purpose, by giving and sharing what we have with others rather than taking it in for ourselves.

 In his letter to the early church in Corinth and to us today, the Apostle Paul wrote*, “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of* ***wisdom****, and to another the utterance of* ***knowledge*** *according to the same Spirit, 9 to another* ***faith*** *by the same Spirit, to another gifts of* ***healing*** *by the one Spirit, 10 to another the working of* ***miracles****, to another* ***prophecy****, to another the* ***discernment o****f spirits, to another various kinds of* ***tongues****, to another the* ***interpretation of tongues****. 11 All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.* ***12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.” [[1]](#footnote-1)***

Friends, God has called us into this global village to work for a common good by proclaiming and sharing God’s message of hope and love. What mission might God be calling us to embark on today and for days ahead? Are we willing to pay attention to God’s calling by stepping up to the challenge, even if the mission may seem daunting and impossible by our human standards. Are we willing to take our leap of faith by stepping into the river of unknown depth in order to reach the Promised on the other side. But trust that no matter what, God’s presence will always go before us and protect us. The Holy Spirit will provide us with the breath of fresh air in order to accomplish our mission. The Spirit will sustain us, cheer us on from the sideline, and pray for us as we continue our journey into the uncertainties of life.

 Jesus said, *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."[[2]](#footnote-2)* There will always be light at the end of the tunnel. **Let us, therefore, go in faith and walk with the light of Christ**. In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *1 Corinthians 12:4-12* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *John 8:12* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)