

A Miracle of Deliverance

One of the most remarkable and inspiring events of World War II was not a victory at all, but a retreat. In May and June of 1940, 338,682 men, two-thirds of them British soldiers along with various allied troops, were evacuated from Dunkirk and its surrounding beaches in northern France. Winston Churchill called it “a miracle of deliverance.”

The Dutch and the Belgians had already surrendered. Hitler’s panzer (tank) divisions had sliced through the French resistance with very little challenge. The British Army, fell back toward the English Channel and found themselves, with their backs to the sea, at a fishing town called Dunkerque (Dunkirk). They were trapped as Hitler’s troops were advancing on them from the hills of France. The Royal Navy was only adequate to rescue a small fraction of them, about 17,000. For the remainder, capture or death was certain. The House of Commons was told to brace itself for “hard and heavy tidings.” Not only would the massive loss of life be a horror, but if these men were to perish, there would be very little chance that England could defend its own soil from the onslaught of the Germans.

It all seemed utterly hopeless before an amazing sight appeared on the horizon. William Manchester described it this way:

“Then, from the streams and estuaries of Kent and Dover, a strange fleet appeared: trawlers and tugs, scows and fishing sloops, lifeboats and pleasure craft, smacks and coasters; the island ferry *Gracie Fields*; Tom Sopwith’s America’s Cup challenger *Endeavor*; even the London fire brigade’s fire-float *Massey Shaw* - all of them manned by civilian volunteers: English fathers, sailing to rescue England’s exhausted, bleeding sons.” - William Manchester, “The Last Lion”

Thousands of those delivered were ferried in multiple trips to huge destroyers that could not negotiate the shallow waters near the beach. Thousands of others were carried all the way back to England by this remarkable ragtag armada.

I cannot help but to think of another ragtag armada of vessels – heroes who by all earthly appearances do not appear to be qualified for the task of rescue. That remarkable armada is the church of Jesus Christ, a community of weak and limited individuals, who, when united by a great cause and empowered by the Holy Spirit, can accomplish great things that belie the mere appearance of things.

It is inevitable that the world, which does not understand matters of the Spirit, will underestimate the divine power of the church. It is unacceptable when the church doubts her own divine ableness to accomplish great things in the kingdom work of rescuing sinners.

²⁰Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. – Ephesians 3:20, 21

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