

1st Reading: 1 Kings 17:17-24

Elijah restores the widow's son to life

After this the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill; his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. She then said to Elijah, "What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to cause the death of my son!"

But he said to her, "Give me your son." He took him from her bosom, carried him up into the upper chamber where he was lodging, and laid him on his own bed. He cried out to the Lord, "O Lord my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I am staying, by killing her son?" Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried out to the Lord, "O Lord my God, let this child's life come into him again."

The Lord listened to the voice of Elijah; the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. Elijah took the child, brought him down from the upper chamber into the house, and gave him to his mother; then Elijah said, "See, your son is alive." So the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth."

2nd Reading: Galatians 1:11-19

The Gospel Paul preaches comes from a revelation of Jesus Christ

For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it. I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors.

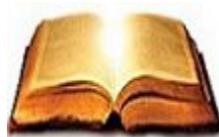
But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus. Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days; but I did not see any other apostle except James the Lord's brother.

Gospel: Luke 7:11-17

Jesus restores to life the only son of a widow at Nain

Soon afterwards he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went with him. As he approached the gate of the town, a man who had died was being carried out. He was his mother's only son, and she was a widow; and with her was a large crowd from the town. When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and said to her, "Do not weep." Then he came forward and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, rise!" The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother.

Fear seized all of them; and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen among us!" and "God has looked favorably on his people!" This word about him spread throughout Judea and all the surrounding country.



Receiving salvation

God's initiative . In the story Jesus takes the initiative; the widow offers only her unspoken need. Jesus acts with such concern and sensitivity that the approach of God's power, though it provokes awe, arouses also praise and faith. If this could be the manner of God's approach to us always! Yet that is precisely Luke's message. Jesus is the image of the Father, sharing in action the love of the Father for us. We only have to place our need of salvation before him. He approaches the spiritually needy as mercifully and with as much concern as the physically needy. Jesus sorrows for human wretchedness, and the only thing he cannot overcome is a refusal to acknowledge the need of God's salvation.

Our realisation . Like the widow we must know that we are in need. We cannot save ourselves. "Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh" (Luke 6:21.) We must weep for our sins, for our indifference, our lack of perseverance in good intentions, our helplessness to heal the ills of the world around us. God is "visiting" us every day of our lives through Jesus, the risen Lord, coming close to us in love and concern. Jesus visits us especially in the Eucharist. We are called first to accept the gifts of life that he gives us, then to praise him joyfully for the gift. We do not have to be in the charismatic movement to do that.

Conversion . Some prefer to reject God's approach or simply disbelieve in Him. Jesus weeps over Jerusalem in sorrow that its response is so poor (Luke 19:44.) Our lives are the poorer if we don't realise that Jesus has the same love and concern for us that he showed for the widow of Nain (or *Naim*) and her son. That is a sort of conversion, of turning towards God, that we look for in the Mass. "Lord, come to me; visit me in your love and stay with me always."

A Mother's Tears

An ironical story attributed to Oscar Wilde takes up where today's gospel ends. It goes something like this: A year later, Jesus came again to this village, Nain, accompanied by his disciples and a great number of people. When he was near the gate of the town he noticed that there was a woman sitting beside the road weeping. Immediately the Lord felt sorry for her and said, "Do not cry". When the woman looked up and saw Jesus standing there she wept even more loudly. "What has happened to you, that you weep so bitterly?" Jesus asked the woman. "Because of you," she answered. "I curse the day I met you when I was burying my only son and you brought him back to life; for now I wish he was dead again."

"Why on earth do you say that?" Jesus asked the distressed woman, and she answered, "When my son came back to life, his fame spread throughout Judaea and all over the countryside. Many people came to admire him and show him homage as a famous man. Before, he had been a dutiful son to me. Now, he is foolishly proud and his head was turned and he has squandered all my savings on wastrels and harlots who fawned upon him, abandoning me here on the wayside with neither son or home." When Jesus heard these words he was astonished and turning around to the crowd he said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found ingratitude like this."

The moral, according to Oscar Wilde, was that nobody, not even God, should interfere in other peoples' lives. Wilde's theology fell far short of his undoubted literary skills. In the gospels there is no miracle which is futile, trivial or unwholesome. Nor are there miracles which inflict evil on anybody. The Lord's *miraculous* intervention in our lives, albeit rare, is always benign. In the case of the bereaved widow, the gospel expressly mentions that "he felt sorry for her." His motive was to heal her pain, not to replace it with another. The motive of this miracle was compassion: its message was God's victory over death. All the miracles of Jesus are the prelude to his own resurrection, which was the decisive triumph of the power of God.

Personal and profound suffering would bring Oscar Wilde himself to a much deeper insight into the compassion of God. Falling from grace, the once literary lion of glittering London society became a social outcast, committed to Reading gaol for what was then deemed as scandalous immorality. In his prison cell, he began to wonder:

For who can say

by what strange way

Christ brings his will to light?

In the humiliation and desolation of his imprisonment, he came like the widow of Nain to experience the compassion of God. *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* has the lines:

Ah! happy they whose hearts can break and peace of pardon win.

How else may man make straight his plan and cleanse his soul from sin?

How else but through a broken heart may Lord Christ enter in?

And he of the swollen purple throat and the stark and staring eyes,

Waits for the holy hands that took the Thief to Paradise;

And a broken and a contrite heart the Lord will not despise.

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Today, we continue our journey in “ordinary time.” Sounds rather boring when you say it like that, but the term “ordinary” does not mean common or plain or boring, but rather it comes from the term ordinal which means “numbered.” These are the numbered weeks of the church year outside of the major feasts and the seasons that surround them – like Advent and Christmas, Lent and Easter. Ordinary time, or the Sundays after Pentecost, are the Sundays in which we focus on various aspects of faith and life in the world as a people of God.

Sometimes when we refer to this time in the liturgical calendar, it is spoken of as the long, boring season in which nothing happens. In a way that is true because we don't have a major feast like Christmas or Easter, but if you look at what happens during this ordinary time, you will see that the Scripture and scheme of the lessons want it to be something much more than ordinary and boring.

The colour for Ordinary time is green – a colour associated with new life and growth. This is sometimes referred to as the “green growing season”. It is the green, growing season not only because of the liturgical colour or because it begins in the summer months when things are growing and thriving. It is the green, growing season because this is the season that gives us the room to breathe, to explore, to learn more about Jesus and his teachings and to find where they intersects with our own lives. This season after Pentecost focuses on the mission of the church in the world and its responsibility in carrying on the work that Jesus gave us to do.

Sojourner's Magazine tells us:

“There’s nothing ordinary about what’s known in the lectionary as ‘ordinary time.’ Not Christmas, not Easter, not Pentecost, but the everyday miracles of God with us, of life on earth. Ordinary time is the time when we try to understand and live the teachings of Jesus. Nothing ordinary about that – a lifetime worth of challenges instead.” [\[i\]](#)

We have a great set of lessons to start off this time of growth, new life, new perspectives and change. The readings for today only come around every so often because of how the liturgical calendar works and I believe that they have a lot to offer us as we begin this journey into ordinary time; into the green, growing time.

In our Gospel lesson today from Luke and in our Old Testament lesson from 1 Kings, we hear of people being healed. These are miraculous stories that are wonderful to hear, and they leave us in amazement. We too often hear stories like these and think that they are great stories, but that they have nothing to do with us. I mean, we can’t raise people from the dead, can we? We cannot simply say that these are inspirational stories and leave it at that. Jesus did not come to earth and become one of us so that we could be inspired, but came to earth as one of us so that we could learn from him and change the world around us into the Kingdom of God. Jesus is constantly reminding the people around him that they are called to live as he lived. It is not only Jesus who is reminding them to live as he lived, but also the Torah called them to follow and live in this way. Thus, we too are called to live as Jesus did.

Our Baptismal Covenant reminds us time and again that we are to live as Jesus did, that we are to be a people of God to everyone around us. It doesn’t matter if we can’t raise people from the dead like he and Elijah did, because we can do other things in this world that are just as important. We are called to be vehicles of God’s grace, love, and peace in the world around us. As we are reminded in our Baptismal Covenant we are to continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in the prayers, we are to persevere in resisting evil, and whenever we fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord, we are to proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ, we are to seek and serve all persons, loving your neighbour as yourself, we are to strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being.

Our life mission is described in the words of the Baptismal Covenant and we see them being enacted today in the Gospel lesson. Jesus comes upon a woman who is in deep grief over her son’s death, her husband’s death, and the fact that she is alone in the world. He does not pass her by thinking that there is nothing that he can do for her, but rather he stops – he stops the funeral procession – and acts out of compassion. He tells her not to weep, not in the way that someone would tell us to stop weeping if they were uncomfortable with it, but in a way that tells her that he will take care of her and show her great care and compassion. In raising her dead son to life, he completely changes the outlook for this woman. She once again has social standing in the community, she once again has a family, she has what she had lost.

Jesus' great love for this woman is just a glimpse of the love Jesus has for each of us. After Jesus gives this mother her son, the people say, "God has looked favourably on his people." Those words are also heard in Mary's song, the Magnificat and Simeon's song, the Nunc dimittis. God looks with favor on God's people. It is all throughout scriptures and it is all throughout our lives. No, our lives are not one happy, hunky-dory moment; but our lives are enriched with those around us and they are brought to fullness and grace through God. Yes, there will be difficulties in our lives, yes we will suffer hardships, there will be war and violence and oppression around us AND it is our duty as people of God to serve in a way, to live in a way as to help stop these horrible things from happening and continuing to happen. God looks with favor on us, God looks with love on us, God looks with grace and unconditional caring upon all of us. It is then our job as people of God to turn and do the same.

There are times in all of our lives when we wonder where God is. How could God be letting this happen? Why didn't God come and save the day and perform a miracle like it happens in the Bible? Where is God in those moments? God is with us. In our moments of pain and suffering and aloneness, God is there in the people who are around us, God is there in that compassionate card or phone call. God is there in the offerings of help, the hugs, and the people who will sit with us as we journey into the depths of our lives. God does not promise that life will be easy. God *does* promise to be there and to look with favor on us. God is a God of compassion and caring, of peace and justice, of love and grace. We, by our Baptismal Covenant and through scriptures are called to be conduits of God in the world through our actions, through our words, and through our very being.

The Practice of Presence, is a book about Brother Lawrence, a Carmelite monk who lived in the 17th century. People are fascinated, mystified and intrigued by this man because he simply lived every moment with God and lived every moment acting out of God's presence in his life. He was assigned to work in the kitchen of the monastery, not anything that he was particularly good at, but did it with faithfulness and with a mind toward God. There was not anything that was beneath him because there was no task that was too mundane or routine as each thing was a medium for God's love. For him, it was not about how sacred or important the task, but more about the motivation behind the task.

As people of God, we are all called to see our tasks as part of our life with God. Mowing the lawn, taking care of our children, driving people to and fro, cleaning, helping, being with others... I could go on and on. Our everyday lives are full of moments with God, it is up to us to remind ourselves and those around us that God is in those moments, just as much as God is in other moments. Who we are, how we act, how we treat others... this is how we are God in the world.

So, in this ordinary time, as we continue to explore where God is calling us to grow, where God is calling us to serve in the world, know that it may be in the everyday, it may simply be in our actions and in our words that we will best serve God. Keep the words of the Baptismal Covenant in mind as a directive and know that God is with you in all that you do.

Download the sermon for [Proper 5C](#).

Written by The Rev. Shannon Ferguson Kelly

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One of the most remarkable features of the First Book of Kings is the collection of stories featuring the prophet Elijah. The first of these comes after the rather generalized anecdotes about the royal house of kings following the death of Solomon. Without exception these monarchs “did what was displeasing to the Lord,” and then suddenly the narration changes subject. In Chapter 16, which precedes our reading for today, King Ahab is introduced and then suddenly Chapter 17 begins with Elijah the Tishbite, “inhabitant of Gilead” confronting Ahab with the observation that the God of Israel has said there is about to be a drought that no amount of royal power can prevent or stop. Rain will come only when the God of Israel says so.

The picture of Elijah being both confrontational and cryptic with King Ahab is actually emblematic of the whole collection of prophetic literature. Prophets are the ones God calls to speak God’s truth to power – to speak and to live as example and warning of God’s alternate reality while the powers that be in monarchical or temple leadership pursue other goals, and achieve their ends by ungodly means.

Prophets function in Biblical texts as the vehicles of God’s word: when they speak God’s judgment on those who perpetrate injustice, they are announcing God’s own critique of social, political, and economic injustices that bring about death, despair, and hopelessness. When they offer alternate pictures of life as God intends it, prophets bring hope to the hopeless, life to those shadowed by death and disaster. In short, prophets bring God’s good news into bad times.

Elijah in today’s reading offers us just such a picture of hope in contrast to the world Ahab and his predecessors have made. In the midst of the drought affecting King Ahab’s world and people, God interrupts Elijah’s life and sends him outside Ahab’s jurisdiction.

First Elijah is sent to the Transjordan, where he is protected and sustained by ravens, but as the drought spreads, he is sent northward up the coast to Zarephath in Sidon. Here, as God said, he finds a certain widow who will feed him. The word of God calls the prophet to go way beyond all the normal support systems of his life. As death, in the form of the drought, spreads, Elijah stays on the move until he comes to the widow. She is, by definition, lacking all the life-giving resources of ordinary patriarchal societies in the ancient world. It is noteworthy also that God sends Elijah without any resources himself: he brings neither bread nor oil to the widow, nor does he bring well water. He has nothing to give away, it seems.

Yet the whole point of the Elijah stories is, precisely, that having nothing at all in the worldview of King Ahab, Queen Jezebel, and all the priests of the pagan gods who are turning the lives of God’s people into a desert, the prophet brings

unimagined and unimaginable hope into the parched lands because he brings the life-giving word of God.

Through Elijah's faithful obedience, God's life-giving word assures the daily bread for the widow. And more than that; when the widow's son dies, and her hope for any sort of normal, ordinary future dies with him, the life-giving word of God renews the boy's life, and therefore hers too. There is holy power at work in Elijah, as in all the prophets, the power of God's life-giving word to break through the death-dealing ways of nature and culture alike.

Before moving to Jesus, we must pause to meditate. You and I have been assured of holy power at work in our own lives: the power of the Holy Spirit allows us to live transformed and transformative lives. Hold that thought.

Now we can move into the gospel and watch Jesus, the living word of God, who is bringing life into another socioeconomic situation like that in the First Book of Kings. Here is Jesus with a widow whose only son is dead.

Our reading from the Gospel of Luke says: "When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and said to her, 'Do not weep.'"

While Luke has undoubtedly structured the scene based on the story of Elijah, there is a significant difference: Jesus' compassion. To have compassion, and to be moved by compassion, is to take the suffering of other persons into oneself. Elijah the prophet was so identified with the God of the life-bearing word that his own actions brought life in the midst of death. Luke's Jesus embraces the suffering of people at the edge of the social fabric, on the margins of the power structures, and thus he identifies with the hopelessness of the widow. With Elijah and Jesus alike, however, the hope that blazes forth from the Biblical texts is God's life-bringing and life-bearing presence, which transforms death-dealing situations into visions and experiences of life as God intends.

Life on the margins is brutal, nasty, and often much shorter than "three score years and ten." The best-contrived social safety nets develop holes, and it does not take the eruptions of nature or the recessions of the human economy before people fall through them. These pictures of Elijah and Jesus can illuminate our own death-dealing times, and prod us to live as Pentecost people called to embrace and bear life as God intends it. We have been empowered by the Spirit to live transformative lives, bearing compassion in deed as well as word, carrying the life of Christ, moved by the power of the Spirit amid the ways of our world – at work, at play, as daughters or widows, soldiers or secretaries, as citizens who care enough to vote.

Christmas and Easter are behind us now, but as the angels said at the nativity and at the empty tomb: "Do not be afraid."

Let us go forth into the world rejoicing in the power of the Spirit.

-- The Reverend Angela V. Askew

What wonderful images we have in today's passages. We have prophets, raisings from the dead, a never-ending supply of food, onlookers being both amazed and terrified. It's the Easter story over and over – amazing and terrifying for the people of that day.

We, of course, can still be amazed, but we're not terrified any more. We know the Gospel passage probably by heart and we most likely know this wonderful passage about Elijah and the widow in Zarephath by heart, too. Stories of long ago, stories about an ancient people, stories from a time when miracles seem to have been taken more in stride than they are today – we might be tempted to think these stories don't have much to do with us. We certainly aren't able to raise the dead or provide through God's intervention a never-ending supply of grain and oil. So, we can be amazed and praise God, but we don't necessarily have to be motivated. Or do we?

We're kidding ourselves if we say that these are just inspirational stories. Jesus constantly reminded his followers that they were called to live as he lived. Actually, their Torah called them to live that way.

Jesus was only reminding them to be faithful to God's rule of life. It's the same for us. Our Baptismal covenant is a promise to live as Jesus did, to be a people of God.

So, we look seriously at these stories to see what they have to say to us. There are several similarities between 1 Kings and the Luke passage. Both Elijah and Jesus are prophets. Both accounts center on bringing a child back from death. The widow is provided with a never-ending supply of grain and oil, and we know that Jesus will supply God's people with a never-ending source of life in his own body and blood. Both stories show us that the ability to give life in various forms is proof that the person is a Godly person – sent by God. In both accounts there is an important connection between what Elijah and Jesus say and what happens. In Luke especially there is always a connection between saying and doing. It's often the connections that give us the “a-ha” moments that excite us.

Consider what the people say when Jesus gives the young man back to his mother: “God has looked favorably on his people.” We hear those same words in the Magnificat and the Nunc dimittis. Elijah tells the widow that the Lord God of Israel will not let her jar of meal go empty or jug of oil fail. God looks with favor. It's all through the Scriptures. God looks with favor, God looks with love, God looks with unfailing care on God's people, especially in the readings today, on the widows.

Now, isn't it interesting that we keep saying God looks with favor and God cares and God loves? Certainly there's no doubt that God does all these things, but look at how often God doesn't do it alone. Look at how often God uses God's people to bring the message of this love and care to others. Here's that connection again – a connection between heaven and earth.

Both Jesus and Elijah are a connection between God and God's people. Neither of them works what we consider a miracle for their own glory. Their actions glorify God. All who witness these miracles give glory to God and acknowledge that God works through these two men. “Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of

the Lord in your mouth is truth,” the widow of Zarephath says. What a wonderful compliment.

The people who witnessed Jesus bring the young man to life said, “A great prophet has risen among us!” Another great compliment! Wouldn’t it be wonderful if people could say that about us? Wouldn’t it be wonderful if people would see us being a connection between God and them?

The thing is – they should. One of the many lessons we might learn from both these Scripture passages is that what Jesus and Elijah did, we must do also. We’ll probably not literally raise people from the dead, but we are called to be conduits of God’s grace, and we are called to be prophetic. Being prophetic doesn’t mean that we have to be dramatic. We are prophetic when we are aware of the needs in the world around us and we speak the truth about it. The power of prophesy is in the truth of the words and the challenge those words offer people to change for the better.

But we also know that prophets often get in trouble. The Old Testament is full of stories about prophets being reviled, ignored, harassed – and sometimes killed. John the Baptist lost his head. Jesus was crucified. Certainly we’re not supposed to be prophets like that are we?

The thing is – we are. Each one of us is called to speak God’s word of truth in a difficult world. Each one of us – not just the Dorothy Days or the Oscar Romeros, the prophets of our time – each one of us has our times to be prophetic. Different situations will affect us in different ways. Often, when we’re most prophetic, we so love what we’re doing that we don’t see ourselves as prophets.

There’s a man in Chattanooga, Tennessee, who left a very lucrative theater job in New York City to join the Brotherhood of St. Gregory. He gave everything away – absolutely everything he owned – to follow a call to serve the homeless poor as a monk in that southern city. Brother Ron lives in the shelter with the homeless. He helps them find medical assistance and food. He counsels them. He lets them know that God loves and cares for them even when they feel most alone and hopeless. Brother Ron also shares the stories of homeless people with congregations, seminarians, and city officials. The interesting thing about Ron is that even when people could be amazed and impressed by the work he does, that’s not what people see first. Ron is a prophet. He speaks the word of God to a hurting world, and he does it with power and truth. People see the graciousness of God through Ron, and they could use the same words the widow of Zarephath said about Elijah: “We know you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth.”

That sounds pretty extraordinary, but Ron isn’t all that different from you and me. Our vocations are unique. The ways we’re called to be prophetic are unique. Like any prophet, we only need to take our connection to God seriously. That connection might be through the Torah, through Baptismal promises, or through whatever our tradition holds as a means of being faithful to God. God will work wonders through each of us

if we're open. God's word of truth can be in each of our mouths. What greater compliment could people say about us than that we are people of God?

-- The Rev. Dr. Susanna Metz