

### **Third Sunday after Pentecost**

9<sup>th</sup> June 2013

*1 Kings 17: 8-24, Psalm 146, Galatians 1:11-24, Luke 7:11-17*

The Old Testament story from Kings and the gospel story from Luke have some obvious similarities. Both narratives are framed around ‘widows’, one from Zarephath and one from Nain. Both are mothers; and again in both stories their sons die and are then brought back to life. In the Old Testament narrative it is Elijah who gives life to the son and in Luke’s narrative Jesus gives life to the widow’s son.

It is of course quite possible that these are two quite different stories of actual events that occurred in different places at different times. And taken at face value, as literal events, they might well have been written to record and affirm the wonders that were worked at the hands of Elijah and Jesus. However, their inclusion in the sacred texts of the Church asks us to look at them in a more universal light; to seek in these stories the living Word of God that speaks of us, and to us, today.

Classically, in an orthodox context, we have heard over and over again about the centrality of resurrection to the mystery of Easter. And certainly our encounter with Easter is an encounter with dying and rising, an invitation to encounter resurrection. However, when only taken in a literal sense, the Easter narrative serves only to identify the unique or super-natural phenomenon of Jesus. Such a basic reading of the story has then been universalised by the Church Fathers through teaching that resurrection was a Christ experience that was performed on our behalf; that is, ‘he died for us’.

Now, let’s leave that classical interpretation and look again at the whole ‘process’ of resurrection within the context of today’s readings. Both the Old Testament narrative and Luke’s gospel give us Pre-Easter resurrection stories to consider. And as both have common settings, it suggests that we are being invited to consider a common process that is being described. These are parallels of Easter set in the everyday, encounters of Easter in Zarephath and in Nain, and so too an invitation for us to consider our own encounter with Easter, and with resurrection in this place and at this time.

As Luke’s is the shorter of the two narratives let’s look and see if we can discover our own parallel narrative that echoes the gospel story. Have you experienced the story of the widow of Nain in your own life story? If we looked through the photo album of your life, would we find this same narrative? Initially most of us will probably not see today’s gospel as our own story, but if we follow the process rather than the actual events as described, then we might appreciate ourselves within the narrative.

The widow of Nain offers us a representation of life that we can all, in one way or another, universally relate to. In a literal sense, those women whose husbands have died will know her; and likewise, mothers who have lost their children will know her. But in the gospel narrative, she can be known also by the many other ‘energies’ of life’s grieving. Married couples, either wife and/or husband, know the widow’s place when the relationship has dulled and is no longer a light that illuminates God’s creative glory. Single people, and those who live alone might experience the widow’s emptiness and yearn for that intimacy that love’s warm touch excites. Retirees, having lost the life partner of career or corporate life, find their old business

cards to be the tombstones of life's past glory. Young people also share the widow's journey as they long for the security of a tomorrow that honours and values their worth. Priests who wander in the 'no-man's land' of prayer can share the loneliness of the widow's grief as they stupefy into signposts, pointing the way but going nowhere. And all of us experience the widow's loss when our creativity falls silent in the noise of mundane repetition. The widows of our world stand not by bier or grave, they trawl shopping malls or solidify themselves in front of TVs, expressing their grief by groaning at all that is wrong.

In the place of the widow we find that the Lord has compassion on us all, and speaks to each and every one of us, "*Do not weep*". Life is an ever-present reality, even when we close our eyes to it. And the gift of life is an ever-present gift; "*The dead man sat up and began to speak.*"

In this short gospel story we might appreciate that the gospel is not to be proclaimed or preached; it is to be lived. First we might find ourselves in the place of the Widow; we **must** find ourselves in the place of the Widow. For only in that place can we hear the gift of life speaking to us; "*Do not weep*". Only when we know the emptiness of ourselves will we be able to open ourselves to the gift of Divine fullness. And, when we come through the fear; "*Fear seized all of them; and they glorified God*", when we come through the fear, then life arises. When we know, "*God has looked favourably on his people!*"; then we might go back into the text, back into the same story, seeing ourselves with our friends in community, entering a town called Nain.

We are not only widows, and we are not only given life; we are givers of life. The reality of resurrection is in our hands, and awaits our bringing that reality into the present:

*The future is not a result of choices among alternative paths offered by the present, but a place that is created - created first in the mind and will, created next in activity.*

*The future is not some place we are going to, but one we are creating.*

*The paths are not to be found, but made,*

*and the activity of making them, changes both the maker and the destination.*

(Deborah James)

And from the discussion group yesterday

*"Ask yourself: Is there joy, ease and lightness in what I am doing? If there isn't, then time is covering up the present moment, and life is perceived as a burden or a struggle."*

*(Practicing The Power of Now, Eckardt Tolle)*

Peter Humphris