

Third Sunday of Pentecost 5 Jun 2016

[1 Kings 17:8-24](#); [Psalm 146](#); [Galatians 1: 11-24](#); [Luke 7:11-17](#) from Vanderbilt

[Proper 5C / Ordinary 10C / Pentecost +5 Jun, 2016](#) Textweek

Today we've had two stories of resurrection, one from the Old Testament and one from the gospel of Luke; they both have some striking similarities, however in hearing them together we are maybe encouraged to wonder what resurrection is all about.

We're all aware that in the Christian tradition, the resurrection of Jesus is a foundation of the Christian faith; however is it really of any concern to us in our everyday lives.

If we seek to be followers of Jesus, then we might also be reminded of the charge he gave to those who wanted to follow:

⁸ Heal the sick, **raise the dead**, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give." [Matthew 10:8]

Resurrection rather than being a 'raising of the dead' as interpreted by the primitive Church might well offer us an insight into life's fullness.

We mostly think that Jesus was the one, and most think the only one, who was raised from the dead; but today we hear of two others, and in fact the bible has accounts of nine different people being raised from the dead. Of these miraculous resurrections, three occur in the Old Testament and then at least three individuals were raised from the dead by Jesus. Both Peter and Paul raised a person from the dead and of course we all know Jesus himself was resurrected.

Before we look more closely at the two accounts of resurrection we've heard in the readings today; let's have a overall look at the dynamic of resurrection in the Bible.

Where do we see the first account of resurrection?

I think most biblical scholars would name the reading from 1 Kings as the first recorded account; but let's be a little more open minded and less literal....

The movement of Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden can be looked at as an account of resurrection, especially if we have outgrown the ideas of Original Sin, the Fall and all the associated simplistic theologies that stem from a literal understanding of the creation story.

And it has many of the elements contained in the stories we're looking at today, a man and a woman as the central characters, the interaction of life and death, and the outcome of 'a new creation', a new reality.

Likewise, the flood narrative, the story of Noah, is a narrative of global resurrection and also has the same elements as the creation story, albeit this time the two by two, male and female, extend to the whole of creation.

We could go on and look at other stories to find more of the same thread, however now we have opened up a new lens for looking through, lets go to the texts for today.

The setting of the scene in both texts tells us something important; from the first reading,

"So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town"; and from the gospel reading, "Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went with him. 12 As he approached the gate of the town".

The inclusion of the gate in setting the scene in both stories very cleverly introduces the idea that these are movements from one place to another from one reality to another reality, these stories are set on the threshold of a new opening; and we might also recall the stone being rolled away as the threshold of the Easter mystery, the very opening of resurrection.

The central character in both texts is a widow, so we are given an awareness of loss, but in both cases the loss is then magnified.

In the first story there are two images that magnify the loss;

"But she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die."";

both hunger and the death of an only son; again echoed in the passion narrative of Easter with the "*I thirst*" spoken from the cross and heard by the mother waiting by the cross.

In the gospel narrative, which is much briefer in detail we hear that

"a man who had died was being carried out. He was his mother's only son, and she was a widow";

the fact that the dead man was "his mother's only son"; leaves the widow without any family support, she is without relatives and so condemned to a future without home or protection.

Both stories are opening for us a contemplation on emptiness, uncertainty; this is more than "loss" it is a stripping back to the core of ourselves when we are emptied

of all that we hold on to; perhaps for most this is a threshold too fearful to even contemplate.

However in both narratives the outcome is life, from the threshold of emptiness is found a life that is beyond imagination and beyond comprehension.

There are some telling signs in both readings that point toward the reality of life that lies beyond the threshold; in the more detailed first reading we are given an image of abundance,

“The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail”.

Perhaps as we contemplate our own self-emptying it is the fear of scarcity that keeps us from the threshold of resurrection; but in that first reading the abundance of bread and oil is a reality that mirrors the new life that comes with the resurrected son.

In the gospel reading, a more direct story, we hear;

“When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and said to her, “Do not weep.” 14 Then he came forward and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, “Young man, I say to you, rise!””;

what was it that stilled the movement of death, that caused the bearers to stand still?

With “compassion for her... he came forward and touched the bier”, it was compassion that enabled Jesus to defile himself and make himself unclean for that is the implication of touching the bier. Jesus goes against the traditional expectation and embraces the body of death; and that selfless act of compassion transcends the threshold of death and leads to new life.

In these readings we are asked to contemplate the future, we are asked to consider a way forward that points to new life and to life’s fullness, and we are asked to move beyond the threshold of the world that is ours today...

The central characters are not Turnbull and Shorten, rather they are the widow and the dead body, the body we fear, and the movement is away from thirst, hunger, and from being carried to the grave; the movement is toward compassion and the reality of abundance.

We have heard it said before, but just by way of a reminder, these are our stories that we read in the bible; and they are echoed in many traditions, here is a delightful account from "The Zen Teaching of Rinzai".

"One day at the street market Fuke was begging all and sundry to give him a robe. Everybody offered him one, but he did not want any of them. The master [Linji] made the superior buy a coffin, and when Fuke returned, said to him: "There, I had this robe made for you." Fuke shouldered the coffin, and went back to the street market, calling loudly: "Rinzai had this robe made for me! I am off to the East Gate to enter transformation" (to die)." The people of the

market crowded after him, eager to look. Fuke said: "No, not today. Tomorrow, I shall go to the South Gate to enter transformation." And so for three days. Nobody believed it any longer. On the fourth day, and now without any spectators, Fuke went alone outside the city walls, and laid himself into the coffin. He asked a traveler who chanced by to nail down the lid.

The news spread at once, and the people of the market rushed there. On opening the coffin, they found that the body had vanished, but from high up in the sky they heard the ring of his hand bell."

To finish, as we talk today of resurrection, I spoke with Raja, our manager in Nepal yesterday, he was with Asminta who has just completed her sixth and final round of chemo, they were at the hospital as she underwent an MRI to see if the chemo had worked.

He asked that they be held in prayer this morning for as we gather here he is expecting the results from her MRI scan... he is wondering if our compassion has brought to birth new life for Asminta.