



Sunday, June 5th, 2016

1 KINGS 17:8-16;

PSALM 146;

GALATIANS 1:11-24;

LUKE 7:11-17

### A READING FROM THE FIRST BOOK OF KINGS

Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you." So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, "Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink." As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, "Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." 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." Elijah said to her, "Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. For thus says the Lord the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth." She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah.

1 KINGS 17:8-16

### Psalm 146

- 1 Hallelujah! Praise the Lord, O my soul! \* I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.
- 2 Put not your trust in rulers, nor in any child of earth, \* for there is no help in them.
- 3 When they breathe their last, they return to earth, \* and in that day their thoughts perish.
- 4 Happy are they who have the God of Jacob for their help! \* whose hope is in the Lord their God;
- 5 Who made heaven and earth, the seas, and all that is in them; \* who keeps his promise for ever;
- 6 Who gives justice to those who are oppressed, \* and food to those who hunger.
- 7 The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind; \* the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;
- 8 The Lord loves the righteous; the Lord cares for the stranger; \* he sustains the orphan and widow, but frustrates the way of the wicked.
- 9 The Lord shall reign for ever, \* your God, O Zion, throughout all generations.  
Hallelujah!

*God our creator and redeemer, inspire your people, in prosperity or adversity, to turn always to you, eternal source of life, health, and goodness; through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

## A READING FROM THE LETTER OF PAUL TO THE GALATIANS

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. In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie! Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, and I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea that are in Christ; they only heard it said, "The one who formerly was persecuting us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy." And they glorified God because of me.

GALATIANS 1:11-24

## THE HOLY GOSPEL OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST ACCORDING TO LUKE

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 favourably on his people!" This word about him spread throughout Judea and all the surrounding country.

LUKE 7:11-17

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*When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and said to her, "Do not weep."*

It was an all too common sight in those days — and in ours, as well. How often do we find ourselves pulling over to let a funeral procession proceed without interference? This we do out of our respect for the departed and their loved ones. This some folk do out of their perception of the law. But not all people agree that the law asks this of us. So sometimes we see an anxious driver speeding by around the stopped cars and the slowly moving procession.

It was less complicated in Jesus' day. In Jewish tradition, the body was often carried out on a bier by men to the burial spot. Today, caskets are carried to the cemetery so that they and the person's body they hold can be placed in an open hole in the ground.

In the case of the situation of the woman's son from Nain, the grave was dug — but there was nobody to be buried there on that day. The grave diggers were likely quite puzzled by it all. *What went wrong?* they must have wondered. But that was the wrong question. The relevant question actually was: *What went right?* What went right indeed?

Consider what Jesus encountered on that day as he approached Nain —> a funeral procession in progress. *The dead man was young and had only one relative — his mother. And logically therefore, his mother had only one relative — her now dead son.*

Now in that day, equal rights and equal opportunity laws were simply not! Not much welfare, either. Families were to look after their own family members. If there was no family — real problems existed, especially for a woman alone. The only other possibility for relief would be from the alms for the poor given in the synagogues. There would have been no legitimate job opportunities available to her. This is why throughout the Old and New Testaments, we find references telling people to look out after widows and orphans.

Jesus knew this situation all too well. Even today, one does not have to be a social worker to know of how various government and social institutional programs work for some, while failing others. We all have heard of the problem.

Now in many of the stories where Jesus brings healing or raises people from the dead, he is confronted by distressed folk asking him to intervene to bring healing or to raise someone from the dead. But notice in this story, how our Lord doesn't wait for anyone to ask. He reacts more like a first responder in a crisis situation. He went directly to where the dead person was being carried; the procession came to a halt; and Jesus said, *"Young man, I say to you, rise!"* *The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother.* No hint of hesitation; no consultations; no thinking it over first; no *should I or shouldn't I* internal debate. Jesus knew what had to be done and did it without any delay. Why was he so aggressive in this case?

I think one reason was that there was not just one potential victim, but there were two! —> the mother and the dead son. First there is the son as a victim in the loss of his earthly life at a young age. Second, as a widow alone, the mother was victimized by having to face almost certain destitution. There were virtually no realistic ways open to her in those days to make a decent living on her own. Since the death of her husband, she would have been totally dependent on her son for support and protection. And now he was taken from her!

Jesus had one very good option to bring major healing to this situation. By raising the son from the dead, an earthly life was preserved and additionally the mother's life was able to be supported indefinitely. Or as we say these days, this act of Christ would bring about a *win/win situation*! The mother would win and so would the son.

Now what does this mean to us? One thing is that God does not always wait to be asked before choosing to act. We often hear how God responds to prayer. Additionally, there are times when God can be seen to move in situations independent of intercessory prayers. This is fully in line with us worshiping a loving, compassionate, wise and intelligent God.

Secondly, as he does so often, Jesus gives us an example to follow when the situation arises. It was noted earlier how Jesus did not wait around for someone to ask him to do the obvious. He saw the need and the potential fallout from the tragedy before him. He acted and lives were saved and enriched.

There may be times when we are called upon to act in the same way! Now that can seem to be a tall order. After all, we are not usually seen to be going around raising people from the dead. So what is there here for us to learn?

As mentioned earlier, our social support systems and charitable organizations do wonderful work. But as hard as they may try, they can sometimes find themselves letting down people who *fall through the cracks*. People whose lives are being ruined for lack of specific kinds of support can find themselves in terrible situations from which they can see no escape until the grave. Sadly, some may be in a state of living death and see no one to help them.

Yet, these people can sometimes be given hope — be given new life! But without a voice, how can they find a way out? They may have no advocates. They may have no one to go around and effectively ask for meaningful aid.

Well, we need not always have to wait for someone to ask us to take action. There may be times when immediate action is the obvious order of the day. Such action may become obvious for you, or me, or someone else best suited for the job at hand. But if we become aware of needs not being met, we just might find ourselves doing what is necessary and good to fill in a crack or two, thereby preventing some folk from painfully falling falling through. And yes, in a very real fashion, people are thereby raised from a state of living death, and healing does take place. Jesus shows us it can be done.

What a wonderful God we have.