

HOSPITALITY

10 June 2007

Luke 7: 36-8:3

Can you smell the Bread baking? What does the aroma bring to mind? A small, small offering of nourishment given by a poor woman to a prophet. This is very basic, very physical, sustenance. Elijah the prophet is in a great tussle with the prophets of Baal – there is drought in the land, no rain – but in the desert God provides food for the prophet, and now a poor widow preparing to die - feeds him. . .

Ordinary things become life giving – bread for the hungry. Imagine the relationship that develops until there is in another twist in the story. The widow's son dies – how tragic is that!

What is his mother to imagine? She rails at the prophet – He in turn carries her son upstairs and has it out with God.

He stretches himself out on the child, three times saying “O Lord my God, let this child's life come into him again” and somehow the child lives!

His mum says “Now I know you are a man of God and that the word of Lord in your mouth is truth”

The child lives –

The Lukan story parallels this – Jesus coming upon the Funeral procession – says to the grieving mother, “Don't cry.” Why ever not? What a strange comment to a woman in grief “Don't cry”. It reminds me of his question to Mary Magdalene at the tomb. “Why are you weeping?”

Don't cry –

We read that Jesus had compassion for this mother – his heart went out to her. He felt it in his guts – he got it, he knew her pain.

Yet he says “don't cry” I wonder what his tone of voice was?

Then he touches the bier carrying the boy – he touches the unclean – the people were frightened – understandably – what is going on here?

He touched the bier and the bearers stood still. What will happen next?

Jesus spoke:

“Young man, I say to you rise!! “Rise,” he said

What will happen now?

There is deathly silence. And the young man sat up and began to speak (v. 15)

What did he say? We don't know.

How did he feel? We don't know.

What happened next?

To him, to his mother? We don't know.

Neither had asked for this – but Jesus had entered their pain, their separation. He had compassion – and what happened next was pure unadulterated grace – the boy's life restored.

The people were afraid and praised God saying

“A great prophet has risen among us!” and “God has looked favourably on his people.”

We have heard of two complete turn arounds – for marginalized people – we have witnessed daring compassion – love in action.

Yet the questions niggle me, what is the point of these stories? And it's all very well for them – it's been a week of death and destruction with no resurrection.

Is it enough to know Jesus had compassion, we have compassion, we hurt, and cannot make sense of the loss.

PS 146 Celebrates a God who upholds the widow and orphan, who gives justice to the oppressed and food for the hungry. The God of creation is the God of justice and liberation.

Debbie Blue says:

“When Jesus brings the widow's son back to life, the people are seized with fear. After all we expect death – it defines the order of the world. But now death – something fixed, that we can count on, that we know – is unfixed. No wonder people are scared! How do you categorize death being undone? There are no categories for it. James Alison says that with Jesus “the whole mechanism by which death retains people in its thrall had been shown to be unnecessary. Whatever death is, it is not something which has to structure every human life from within (as in fact it does) but rather it is an empty shell, a bark without a bite”(*Raising Abel*). Resurrection forces us to revise our perceptual categories, our estimations of what is real, and question what normally orders our world. Resurrection unravels the logic, the structure, the systems we've come to believe in, the ground of our judgment (*our* judgment, not just *theirs*). It's frightening and unbelievably hopeful.

Jesus has compassion on the widow. . . (He) doesn't just take the widow's needs seriously, he takes them into the core of his being and makes her pain his own. . . Compassion is not about boundaries and rational detachment. Brueggeman calls it a radical threat to the numbness maintained by the dominant order, and says that it's not “triumphant indignation” that will undermine the world of competence and competition,” but “passion and compassion” (*The Prophetic Imagination*). The stories of . . . Elijah and Jesus suggest that radical change requires passion and compassion for our political and personal and religious enemies. Compassion isn't formulaic or predictable or tidy or even rational – yet it is perhaps the only thing that can save us.

Elijah and . . . Jesus, . . . acted without their assistance being sought. They inserted themselves into the situation as good news for the afflicted. Might we say they were “present” in the place and moment of need? And in that light the response of the people might legitimately be translated, . . . “God is present with his people.” Might we as God's people be such presence in places of need?

Story

A woman in a village was surprised to find a fairly well-dressed stranger at her door asking for something to eat. "I'm sorry," she said "I have nothing in the house right now."

"Not to worry," said the amiable stranger. "I have a soup stone in this satchel of mine, if you will let me put it in a pot of boiling water I'll make the most delicious soup in the world. A very large pot, please."

The woman was curious. She put the pot on the fire and whispered the secret of the soup stone to a neighbour. By the time the water began to boil all the neighbours had gathered to see the stranger and his soup stone. The stranger dropped the stone into the water then tasted a teaspoonful with relish and exclaimed, "Ah, delicious! All it needs is some potatoes."

"I have potatoes in my kitchen," shouted one woman. In a few minutes she was back with a large quantity of sliced potatoes that were thrown into the pot. Then the stranger tasted the brew again. "Excellent!" he said. But added wistfully, "If we only had some meat, this would become a tasty stew."

Another housewife rushed home to bring some meat that the stranger accepted graciously and flung into the pot. When he tasted the broth again he rolled his eyes heavenwards and said, "Ah, tasty! If we had some vegetables it would be perfect, absolutely perfect."

One of the neighbours rushed off home and returned with a basketful of carrots and onions. After these had been thrown in too and the stranger tasted the mixture, he said in a voice of command. "Salt and sauce." "Right here", said the housewife. Then came another command, "Bowls for everyone." People rushed to their homes in search of bowls. Some even brought back bread and fruit.

Then they all set down to a delicious meal while the stranger handed out large helpings of his incredible soup. Everyone felt strangely happy as they laughed and talked and shared their very first common meal. In the middle of the merriment the stranger quietly slipped away, leaving behind the miraculous soup stone that they could use any time they wanted to make the loveliest soup in the world.