

Pastor Geoffrey R. Boyle
3rd Sunday after Pentecost
9 June 2013
Grace-Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
1 Kings 17:17-24; Luke 7:11-17

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

We like it when God gives life to the dead.
We don't like it so much when He gives death to the living.

Today's readings speak to the reality of our lives.
In two very short accounts, we go from utter depression and bitter pain, to miraculous joy.

These two stories, however, don't exactly match our experience.

Just this past Monday night, Pastor Joshua Hatcher, at Trinity Lutheran in Memphis, TN,
went to check on his three-year-old son, Thomas, and found him not breathing.¹
Thomas died of a cerebral aneurysm while he was sleeping.

The Funeral was yesterday.

I'm sure both Pastor Hatcher and his wife can sympathize with the widow who said to Elijah,
“*What have you against me?*” (1 Ki 17:18)

Like the widow of Nain, tears surely flooded their eyes, as they followed the casket to the grave.

Another Pastor, Peter Gregory, at St. Paul in Fort Wayne is not at his pulpit today either.
He's in the NICU, hoping and praying that his youngest son, Lazarus—
who's name means, “*The Lord is my help*”—
will be helped by the Lord.

Lazarus was born Tuesday.

And then even here in Wichita.
At Wesley there's a young boy named Gideon—
he's been fighting for his life, just as Gideon fought for the life of Israel.
Gideon's twin brother died just after birth;
and he's been in the hospital since a week before our Brigit was born.

Gideon is a member of Christ Lutheran in Hutch.

This is what life is like in a world like ours.

It's full of pain and sorrow.
It's not fair.
Children aren't supposed to die!
Not in the womb, not in their sleep, not at all.

¹ <http://trinitymemphis.org/?p=4412>.

We can understand the tears of the two women in our readings today.

And where is God in all of this?

Where was He when the woman's son became ill;

"and his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him"? (1 Ki 17:17)

Where was He when the only-begotten son of a widow was being carried by the casket-bearers?

Where was He for young Thomas, or Lazarus, or Gideon's brother, or the millions of children that have died at the hands of abortionists throughout this country?

Where is God in such horrendous suffering?

That's Elijah's question this morning:

"O Lord my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by killing her son?" (1 Ki 17:20)

When the widow came to Elijah full of despair and accusations against the Lord,
He didn't lie or waste his time trying to get God off the hook.

He admits it.

It's God's fault.

Let's go to Him.

And he took the child, extended himself over him, and prayed,

"O Lord my God, let this child's life come into him again." (1 Ki 17:21)

Three times he prayed this way.

"And the Lord listened to the voice of Elijah." (17:22)

When the child revived, Elijah delivered the boy back into his mother's arms.

"See, your son lives." (17:23)

In our Gospel, there's not even a request for help.

There's just sadness, brokenness, death.

Jesus saw the mother and *had compassion on her*. (Lk 7:13)

Compassion isn't just feeling sad for another.

The word in Greek, *splangknizomai*, is where we get our English, "spleen."

It means that Jesus' gut hurt.

His stomach churned.

It was a visceral reaction—His insides ached with the pain of the mother.

And so He said, “*Do not weep.*” (7:13)

He didn’t say it coarsely, as if she needed to toughen up and get over it.
You don’t get over the death of a child.

He said it to her as a promise.
His very speaking wiped her tears away as if His word was a sponge for her eyes.

As soon as He spoke the words, he stopped the funeral procession, touched the casket, and said,
“*Young man, I say to you, arise!*” (7:14)

At that moment the widow’s son encountered the Virgin’s Son.
Death turned its back and fled, while Life came forth victorious.

With such a Jesus—
a Jesus who speaks His eternal life into our mortal bodies—
we have hope in the midst of this broken world.

For here, where Jesus continues to speak His life-giving Word—
where He continues to touch our dead and dying bodies with His grace-filled hands—
here we can say with Elijah, “*See, your son lives.*”

That’s the promise to the Hatchers and the Gregorys.
That’s the word to Gideon and to all baptized children fighting for their lives in a fallen world.

That’s the hope of every Christian:
that this same Jesus—
who entered into our mortal flesh,
who suffered death unjustly,
who’s mother cried tears of anguish, and who’s disciples fled for fear—
that this Jesus still speaks and touches today.

That’s what goes on at this altar today and every Lord’s day.
The hand and voice of Jesus come together in the Sacrament of the Altar.
They reach and touch the lives of those who just as well deserve the casket as any other.

Just as Elijah gave the woman’s son back into her arms, miraculously alive;
and just as Jesus gave the boy back to his mother, speaking and full of life;
so also do I give you back to your holy mother, the Church—
full of the life-giving body and blood of Christ Jesus the head!

In a world of sin and death, where children go before parents and the wicked go by unscathed,
we still have our Lord—who still speaks, and reaches out and touches, who still gives life.

This Jesus is here for you. And you live.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit