

Sermon on Luke Seven

My options for preaching today are wonderful, miraculous stories. Stories about people being raised from the dead; stories I believe to be true. But I find them hard to preach because I've sat with the wife as she prayed for healing of her husband; with the mother praying for God to cure her only child from brain cancer; for the protection of friends far away that didn't happen. I struggle because I have prayed for the healing of loved ones from their pain and diseases and it didn't happen.

I struggle to preach to all of you because you have been that widow in the funeral procession; walking behind the casket of your loved one; wondering why God didn't answer your prayers. I struggle because in this story the widow says nothing to Jesus; she doesn't ask him for a miraculous cure, in fact he doesn't know her and finds out from the crowd that she is a widow who has now lost her only son. When Jesus hears this our Gospel reading today says that he is filled with compassion for her, but it's much more than that. It's the feeling one gets in the pit of your stomach when you hear bad news about yourself or someone you love. It's like getting hit in the stomach and having the wind knocked out of you.

Even though in this story the widow says nothing; we can well imagine the conversation she's having with God at this moment. We know because we've been there. We wonder if there was some sin that we committed that God has remembered and is now punishing us for it by not answering our prayer for healing. We wonder if our faith was not strong enough for God to hear our pleas and prayers for healing. We hear her telling God that she should have been the

one taken; how could God be so cruel to take the life of one so young and leave her all alone in the world.

So why do we keep turning to God in our times of hurt? Why do we keep turning to God with our prayers for healing? Why do we keep coming to worship? Hope. Hope that the promises given to us in our baptisms are true; that we are marked with the cross of Christ forever and that having been united with Christ's death that we are also united with his resurrection. Hope that we are children of God and heirs of the kingdom; a kingdom where God will not only wipe away our tears, but has also taken away the reason for the tears. Hope that just as Jesus stopped the procession of death in our Gospel reading for that young man; that he will also stop our eternal death.

It's the hope that the promises given to us in the bread and wine of communion are true. That this is Christ's body broken for us. That this cup is the new covenant shed in his blood for the forgiveness of sins. It's the hope that a God who loves us so much that God became one of us, lived with us and died for us will one day redeem us.

It's the hope that Paul writes to us in Romans 8: "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."