

A question of compassion

5 6 16

Lord, you have taught us,
that all our doings without love are nothing worth:
send your Holy Spirit
and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of love,
the true bond of peace and of all virtues,
without which whoever lives is counted dead before you.

Our text may be found in today's passage from Luke's gospel chapter 7, verse 14:

'Young man, I say to you rise !'

Last week, our gospel passage was Luke 7 v1 - 10. This week, our gospel passage is Luke 7 v 11 - 17. Last week, Capernaum. This week, Nain. Last week, a miracle of healing - the unnamed centurion's unnamed slave. This week, a miracle of healing - the unnamed widow's unnamed son. One, a question of faith; the other, a question of compassion.

I love these pair of miracles in parallel. It is not by chance that Luke juxtaposes them and that our Common Lectionary allows us to hear them read one week after the other. I think the one sheds light on the other and, together, both give us an insight into the character and nature of our Lord Jesus Christ and the faith which can transform our lives.

Jesus has travelled a day's journey to the south. From Capernaum on the shore of the Sea of Galilee down to Nain, a town not that far from Nazareth, once Jesus' hometown. On the outskirts of the town, just to the north of Shunem where once Elisha had restored to life a once childless woman's son (2 Kings 4), we have another woman weeping for the loss of her only son. A widow, in the company of her neighbours, family and friends, is making her way, amid the sound of Jewish mourning, to lay to rest her newly dead son. In a hot climate, without modern refrigeration, there was no delay between the time of death and the time of burial. The sound and sight of such fresh, communal distress would have greeted Jesus, his disciples and the large crowd that were following him. Moved by what he sees and what he hears, Jesus speaks to her: **'Do not weep.'** Then, Jesus stretches out his hand to touch the bier on which the young man's body is laid and those carrying it, stop for a moment. Then, Jesus, in the words of our text today, addresses the lifeless body of the widow's son: **'Young man, I say to you rise !'** And he does; he speaks; and Jesus hands her now living son back to his amazed mother. The crowd is awe-struck and frightened but the people glorify God, giving thanks for such unexpected kindness. And news of the miracle spreads throughout Galilee and Judea.

Two people are healed and restored to those who love them. One is close to death; the other has already died. For one, it is their master's concern that speaks for him; for the other, it is the sight and sound of a mother's grief that speaks for him. One is healed at a distance; the other by Jesus being next to him, close enough to touch him. Both are signs of the goodness of God expressed

through the actions of his Son, Jesus Christ. For those who witness the miracles, what Jesus has done is a challenge to how they see who and what Jesus is.

For us today, these two miracles are a challenge: to our faith and to our understanding. One shows clearly the authority Jesus has in the spiritual realm, the power and possibility to restore health and wholeness to the sick and the suffering. The other demonstrates his compassion for our understandable suffering in the face of our inevitable mortality. Both can encourage us in the face of what is in front of us to see that ultimately all will be well.

May we all be suitably encouraged by what we have heard this morning.

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

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G: Sermons 34 : Compassion

