

Since Christ is Risen, So We will also Rise - Kings 17: 17-24

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

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Dear Christian Friends:

Long ago, the family was more important for financial security than it is today. Today, we have insurance and other sorts of financial aid during times of tragedy. Losing a loved one always leaves a hole ... an empty space in our lives. That never changes. But we do have resources today to help us with the financial burden of losing a loved one. Losing a loved one today can mean financial loss in addition to the mental and emotional loss, but the financial burden of death is nothing like it was long ago.

Long ago, there was only family and the charity of neighbors. Long ago, parents depended on children to care for them in their old age. An older father or mother with no family was facing financial ruin. If a person had no children, he or she had no means of support. Long ago it was the reality.

The two readings of today remind us about death. Even though we do not want to think about death and even though we do everything in our power to avoid death, still death is something we all must face, and we all must die. Death is one of the most severe afflictions that the human race must endure. It is a result of the fall into sin, and Scripture reminds us "the soul that sins, it shall die."

Death takes away parents and leaves children as orphans. It deprives a woman of her husband and makes her a widow. It robs parents of the child they love. Death seems so indiscriminate. It can strike at any time, at any age, in every family. And death is so final, for there is nothing we can do to prevent it or to change it once it happens.

In our lessons for today we are confronted again with the reality of death. But more importantly we see the life-giving power of God at work for His people. In one lesson, the one that is our text, we see Elijah raising a dead boy in a little town called Zaraphath. In the gospel lesson we see Jesus raising the young man from Nain. The two events have a great deal in common. In both cases, the boys who had died were the only sons of their mothers. Both women were widows.

In Zaraphath God performed a miracle through the prophet Elijah. In Nain, the people who saw the miracle of Jesus said "A great prophet has appeared among us and God has come to help His people."

These two events are similar, but there is one difference between these two readings. Elijah prayed to God and asked God to bring the son back to life. Jesus simply told the son to rise. Elijah interceded with God on the dead son's behalf. Jesus acted directly on the dead son that He met. Jesus did not have to pray to God because Jesus is God.

But these two events point to the same truth - the truth that runs throughout all of the Old and New Testament scriptures, that our great and gracious God loves us so much that He is always there to reach out to us, to use His almighty power to help us and to give us hope when we need it the most.

Time and time again God shows that He is concerned about the needs of the people of the world, as He comes to help them. And so we see Him at work to help a poor widow of Zaraphath and her son. A great drought had brought a famine upon the land and her food was all but gone. When Elijah, at God's direction comes to Zaraphath, he meets this widow gathering sticks for a fire so that she can prepare a last meal for her and her son from the little bit of flour and oil she has left. But by a miracle of God the flour in the jar and the olive oil in the jug were never depleted so that the widow, her son and the prophet Elijah were fed during all the days of the famine. But the solution of the food problem did not end the widow's troubles.

Another problem soon confronted her. Her son became very ill. The boy grew worse and worse until finally he died. Just when things were looking up, death robbed the woman of the only thing she had left: her beloved son. And this loss laid a spiritual burden upon her. She lived among people who worshipped the god Baal. Her god could not hear her prayers or offer her any comfort or hope. And in her grief, this woman says to Elijah "What do I have to do with you, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my iniquity to remembrance, and to put my son to death!"

Her first reaction is to suppose that she is being punished for some sin. And although she knew Elijah as a man of God, still she herself did not yet believe in the true God, and so she was all alone without visible or invisible means of support. She does not know the true God, nor the love and hope that he offers to His children, even in the face of death. And that makes the death of her son a heavy burden to bear.

The woman seems to chide Elijah, to hold him responsible in part for what has happened. All Elijah does is say "Give me your son. He then carried the lifeless body up to the guest room where he was staying. He laid the body on his bed and then asks God "O LORD my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by killing her son?"

If Elijah had stopped with that question, then his reaction to the boy's death would have

been similar to the mother's. But Elijah does not stop there; he went on to let God answer his question by performing a miraculous deed. Our text continues "Then he stretched himself upon the child three times and cried to the LORD, "O LORD my God, let this child's life come into him again." And the LORD listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived." God chose to work a very powerful miracle to give this woman the help and hope she needed. The life-giving love of God was at work through Elijah. Elijah was the instrument, but God was the life-giver.

This was the first resurrection miracle that scripture records for us, but it was not to be the last. Many others followed, most memorably those performed by Jesus, such as the one in the gospel lesson today. And they all looked forward to a greater resurrection miracle - when Jesus Christ rose from the dead for us.

What this miracle shows us is that even in the face of such a powerful enemy as death God can still give us help and hope when we need it the most. That is what He, in His love and mercy does for this woman. He did the same thing for the widow of Nain when Jesus, in His compassion raised that widow's son from the dead.

But what about us? We cannot expect that God will today restore life to our departed loved ones if we will only pray long enough and hard enough over their corpses, as some people have foolishly believed. But when we must deal with the death of those we love, God continues to give us help and hope when we need it the most. The psalmist David can confidently said "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for though art with me, Thy rod, and Thy staff, they comfort me."

David had never seen nor heard of a resurrection like the one in our text. Yet he knew that God does help His people and give them hope when they need it the most. God does help us, even when we are confronted by death. He does give us hope in the dark moments. And He does that as He blesses us with life - the life that is in His Son, real life in the fullest sense of the word. It was God's will that His own Son should die on the cross for the sins of the world, for our sins, and then be raised again from the dead. And in that life-giving act God has given us the help and hope we need in the face of death.

If Christ had not died for us, then we would be suffer a fate far worse than physical death, for we would also experience eternal death in hell. And if He had not risen again from the dead, then all death would be final and irreversible. But through the cross and in the resurrection of Christ from the dead, God has set us free from the power of sin and death. He has taken away the reason for fear. Death is no longer final. The grave is not all that is left for us. And it is this promise of the life-giving love of God that really is our help and our hope in the face of death.

Friends, we cannot avoid the reality of death in this world. People we love will die. We must die. And death is heavy burden for anyone to bear. But death need not defeat us. Even though God does not choose to work for us great resurrection miracles like that of our texts, it does not mean that He is not with us to give us His help and a living hope when we need it the most. In His own son, God has made us alive, even when we were dead in our sins and in that Son we have hope, even in the face of death.

Just as surely as the widow of Zaraphath saw her son alive, just as surely as the young man in Nain was brought back to life by the power of the Lord, just as surely as Christ is raised from the dead, so shall all believers on the day of resurrection leave their graves to live with God in the glories of His never ending kingdom. That is the living help and hope that God gives us in His Son, and with that hope we can face all things in life and in death. Amen.

“The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keeps your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour”. Amen