

**ORDINARY SUNDAY 10 – JUNE 6<sup>TH</sup> 2010**  
**1 Kings 17:17-24; Luke 7:11-17**

**Notes 1 Kings 17:17-24**

- The presumption here is that the child's illness is a consequence of some obscure sin. The holy man of God arrives and in some ways is a representation of the holiness of God and so the child's sin becomes a complication. He thus falls sick.
- The fear was that now God's presence was in the house, further terrible consequences would be forthcoming because there were sure to be other sins that had been forgotten about or were unknown.
- The upper room of the house was probably a simple shelter built on the flat roof of the mud brick home. Sick people were generally moved to these open spaces for the sake of hygiene and comfort.
- The text does not actually say that the boy died just that he was seriously ill and weak.
- This healing is generally referred to as contractual healing. The belief was that ill health could be transferred to a person through touch. There are examples also where the king's sickness could be transferred to a clay figure by touching various parts of the body. Here, Elijah passes his health to the young boy.
- The boy is restored to life, meaning health rather than "back to life". He once again has full vitality and health.

We read in Luke 5:8 Peter's plea: *Leave me Lord; I am a sinful man.* And again, in Mark 1:24 the evil spirits question Jesus: *What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?* This is the kind of thinking that was common in Hebrew theology and which we find at the basis of this story from 1 Kings: God does not tolerate sin and responds to it with a harsh judgment.

Peter understands all too well that he is a sinner and when he sees Jesus in action and listens to the words he utters, he is also aware that he is in the presence of a man of God. All he can do is hope that he can slip away before harm comes to him. The same thing goes with the evil spirits. They are happily going about their business when they come across Jesus. As soon as contact is made, they understand that their evil ways are under threat. God and evil just do not go hand in hand. In fact, in the Gospels, this is a powerful message: when Jesus is present evil ceases to hold any power over a person or a situation. The answer to the spirit's question is: *Yes, I have come to destroy you! Now clear off!*

In our story from 1 Kings we see the terrible situation where the mother of this small boy is distraught because she believes that the presence of God in her house has highlighted some previously unacknowledged sin. As a consequence, her son is dying. The presence of God, this time in the person of the prophet, means that sin is to be punished. It is a sad, sad perception of God and one that the prophet condemns by his actions.

Elijah takes the child and presents him to Yahweh in prayer and the boy's health is restored. When he is returned to his mother the mother is then able to give praise to God and to understand that God is working away in the community through his chosen prophets.

This story is about a fundamental shift in the people's understanding of God. The boy was sick because he fell ill. He was not sick because God was bringing some kind of terrible judgment upon the house. What we find is the reverse. In the presence of God, all evil is removed. In this case the boy is restored to health but that is not the real message. The healing is there to tell us something significant about God and his impact in our lives. God's presence brings with it life and vitality, new beginnings and an animation rather than death.

There is a teaching in the Bible that we call the *theophany*, the “God-noises”. We see these best on Mt Sinai at the giving of the ten commandments and on the day of Pentecost. How do we know that God has come down on the mountain or Sinai or on the apostles in that upper room? There is fire and a mighty wind, there is an earthquake and lots of noise. These are all literary devices to remind us that when God is present things do not stay the same. When God is truly present something happens.

This is what we find in our story today. When God is in the room, in the person of Elijah, the boy is healed. In fact, the way that we know that God is present is that evil and darkness disappear.

That is not a bad measuring stick for ourselves as a Church and as faith communities. How do we know that we are doing God’s work, that we truly are the people of God? Because God will be in all that we do, think and say. If God is present, then there will be life, an animation, a vitality and an absence of evil ways, evil words and evil actions. It is one thing to claim to have God in us, it is another thing entirely to be able to live God-directed lives.

We are called to live as though we are Elijah in our own worlds. We are to be the presence of God to the people among whom we live and with whom we deal. We are to be, both individually and as faith communities, the way God removes from within us, all that is dark and evil, all that is hurtful and divisive, all that is contrary to his teachings. To do that we first of all have to have God within us and we will know that is true by what we do and how we live.

### **Notes to Luke 7:611-17**

- Just prior to this section, Jesus had been preaching his message and offering his teaching on the way of life of a disciple (6:17-18).
- This story is also found in Matthew 8:5-13 and John 4:46-54. A centurion was in charge of one hundred soldiers.
- This man was a God-fearer – a Gentile who was open to the teachings of the Jews and who was a supporter of the local community.
- The leaders of the synagogue come to Jesus indicating that this soldier was some kind of benefactor of theirs.
- The centurion sends servants to tell Jesus not to come to his house for he is unworthy. This was a massive compliment, especially as he refers to Jesus with the honorific title “Lord”.
- The story of the widow here is probably meant to be a connection between the ministry of Jesus and the prophetic ministry of Elijah. The economic consequences of a widow losing her only son would have been massive, possibly even leading to her own starving to death. This is an event of some consequence.
- Jesus shows the woman compassion, a very strong emotion that is usually associated with acts of divine mercy (Prov 17:5).
- The phrase *he presented him to his mother* is word for word the phrasing used in 1 Kings 17:23.
- For the first time it is acknowledged that *a great prophet has been raised up*. This is the first explicit use of the title for Jesus though he has been shown to be acting in a prophetic manner. In Deut 18:15 we read: *The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me...*
- The phrase *among us* is significant for the prophet’s role was carried out from within the people of God (Acts 2:22; 3:22).
- This is in a way repeated when the crowd continue by noting that *God has visited his people* language that was found in the song of Zechariah (see also Lk 19:44 and Acts 15:14).

In chapter six of Luke's Gospel we have his version of what in Matthew is called the Sermon on the Mount. It is an outline of the fundamentals of his teaching on the Kingdom of God. There we find that in the coming of the Son of Man, God's Kingdom is established on the earth. In that Kingdom things change. All is not as it was previously. The poor, the hungry, those filled with fear and despair have their lives turned around. The proud, the abusers of power and privilege, the rich and those for whom life is going along nicely while all around the poor suffer, those people will crash to the earth. He preaches a Kingdom which is defined by love, by compassion, generosity, forgiveness, reconciliation, integrity, sacrifice and a willingness to live for others. It is an exciting vision of a whole new world, a transformed creation and it all comes about through the presence of Jesus Christ.

Like so many other stories in the Bible, we are shown a world that is transformed through the presence of Jesus. If he is present, then things change. If the Kingdom of God is truly established in the lives of the community, then they are living differently. It is impossible to confuse the Kingdom with other kingdoms of this world.

We see this with the Centurion. Here is a man who is in desperate need of assistance and yet is able to acknowledge that as a sinner he is unworthy of the mercy and love of Jesus. He does not even feel that he can welcome him into his house. For Luke, that is the beginning of the growth of the Kingdom. It grows out of an understanding that we are weak and sinful beings, whose lives are far from what they should be. But in our sin we turn to God with a contrite and humble heart. The consequence for the Centurion was the healing of his servant. His world was turned around and the promises of chapter 6 became realities for him, all because he relied not on his own considerable power and influence but because he was a humble and repentant sinner who was able to come before the Son of God in his need.

We see a similar theology in the story of this widow of Nain. Here is a woman whose life has been turned on her head. She is already a widow and would have been struggling on the fringes of the community. Without a husband to care for her and to earn a living, she would have been just eking out a living and managing to survive. All that has suddenly been made worse by the death of her only son. Not only was she grieving the loss but she would have also been very aware of what the rest of her life had to offer her. Not a great deal.

Then into the picture comes Jesus. Confronted with emptiness, pain and powerlessness, Jesus reaches out with compassion. Again, with this woman we see the very embodiment of the kinds of sufferings outlined in Luke's Sermon in chapter 6. She is all of those things. In the presence of Jesus though it is all turned around. Her sorrow becomes joy, her fear becomes peace and what was dead now comes alive. That is exactly what Luke is telling us about the Kingdom. In the presence of Jesus life is turned around, there is a new creation and our lives are transformed.

### **Conclusion:**

The constant in both of our readings today is the notion of the presence of God. When God makes his presence found then things change. Death and darkness disappear and new life begins. For the widow of 1 Kings, this presence of God was to be found in the person of the prophet. In the miracle stories from Luke, God's power flows out through the words and actions of Jesus Christ his only Son. When God is truly present, then there can be no room for darkness and evil.

That, of course is the challenge for all of us who call ourselves disciples of Jesus Christ and sons and daughters of God. How does God bring alive his kingdom in the world of today? By choosing, calling and sending we who profess to be disciples of his Son. We are the way that God is encountered in creation. We are the way through whom the people of our communities, of our world, of our work place, neighbourhood, street, family,

whatever....come to know and experience the love and mercy of God. If they cannot experience it through we who are baptised into the life of God, how else are they to experience it?

It is the teaching that comes from today's readings that are the teachings that should shape what we do as a Church and how we live as individual believers. We need to be evaluating how we live and how we act to explore whether or not our actions are making Christ known. Are we in fact windows into the divine life? Do people meet Christ when they meet us? Are we bearers of the Kingdom of God. It is quite a challenge for all of us but also an exciting promise. God sends us out and empowers us to make the Kingdom alive in our world. But it is up to us whether or not we take up that challenge.