

**The Church of the Holy Trinity, Rittenhouse Square
June 10, 2007 (2nd Sunday after Pentecost)
By the Reverend Meg Buerkel
“Hallelujah!”**

In the Name of the Holy One, the Source of Life, Light, and Love.
Amen.

‘Hallelujah’ frames today’s psalm – it’s the ‘alpha and the omega’ of the psalm – the beginning and the end. Our translation even adds the exclamation points – Hallelujah! ‘Hallelu’ is the imperative form of the verb ‘praise,’ and the ‘Yah’ is a shortened form of Yahweh – God... King James rendered ‘Hallelujah’ as ‘Praise ye the LORD!’ Hallelujah encapsulates the psalmist’s view that praise is the only response to make to the God who is sovereign over all of creation: praise the God who ‘made heaven and earth, the seas and all that is in them;’ praise the God who ‘gives justice to those who are oppressed, and food to those who hunger;’ praise the God who ‘sets prisoners free, opens the eyes of the blind, and lifts up those who are bowed down.’ Praise the God who has compassion and rights wrongs and initiates new life.

I must say that I love that all of our readings today are about new life – the old has passed away, quite literally, and is replaced by the new, and the new is brought about and blessed by God. Hallelujah!

In our first reading, the widow provides hospitality and food for the prophet Elijah in the middle of a drought. Despite her good works, her son dies. Elijah prays to God to restore her son’s life, he lives, and Elijah “gives him to his mother.”

In our second reading, Paul tells us about his former life as a persecutor of the followers of Christ. But after God revealed Christ to Paul, the new Paul became a believer and one of the greatest missionaries, traveling near and far while proclaiming the New Covenant of God’s Holy Love to the Gentiles.

The story from Luke echoes the reading from the Old Testament – another widow mourns her only son’s death. For her this was a grave and dangerous situation – not only had she lost her son, but without a male figure in her home, she was likely to fall into abject

poverty. The crowd that had gathered with her was mourning his death as well as her life. Jesus and the crowd that followed him met this woman at the gate of the town. As the two crowds met, Luke tells us “the Lord saw her, [and] he had compassion for her.” At least, that’s how the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible translates it. The New International Version says, ‘he saw her and his heart went out to her.’

Jesus had compassion – his heart went out – today we might say, ‘he felt her pain’.

And then Jesus tells the corpse to rise, and ‘[Jesus gives] him to his mother.’ This story draws its power from the earlier story.

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Both Jesus and Elijah acted as they did because they had compassion. Elijah knew the widow and her son, he had lived with them for a time – indeed he owed his life to them and their hospitality. Jesus probably did not know the widow or her son, but he knew her dire predicament – and his heart went out to her.

This word ‘compassion’ – comes from the Latin words ‘com’ (with) ‘passion’ (suffering). Compassion is the understanding of another’s pain on a deep, personal level. It’s not merely ‘feeling sorry’ for another – it’s feeling another’s pain, suffering, and vulnerability within our very being. And here we have two of our ancestors in faith – one of them Jesus the Christ – exhibiting this trait. We have all been there – those moments when tears well in our eyes and our insides seem to expand beyond the confines of our body. And, often the only thing we can do is simply be present with the one who suffers – somehow we know that nothing we say or do can give comfort – we are helpless, other than to offer a holy presence. A holy and sacred presence where pain is accepted, and not covered; where suffering is present and not hidden. We could say that compassion is a holy acceptance of the whole of the other person, pain and all.

When we step back and look at the whole of the ministry of Jesus – we see a life filled with compassion. And this compassion led him to give justice to the oppressed, to right wrongs, to initiate new life.

And compassion is what we are called to at this present time in this community – compassion on all sides. Arthur Schopenhauer says

compassion is “the basis of all morality.” Let us be moral people in the coming days and weeks – let us try to understand each other with our hearts, our beings. Let us show compassion to each other.

Compassion, in our scripture today, and in our lives, is the impetus for new life. We see this in the lives of the widows and their sons. Their lives were new – changed and new. In our own lives, this may not be quite so dramatic, but new life, new understanding, new passion may arise within ourselves when we truly understand another person. And this will lead us to change our lives, to change our community, to change our world.

Walter Fletcher has said, “Whenever compassion and power come together for the vulnerable and suffering in this world, Godly wonders can and do occur.”

I believe in this community – I believe that each of us act with compassion. I believe that Godly wonders can and will occur here, in this very place. Indeed, they already have. Praise God! Hallelujah!

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