

June 6, 2010

Scripture: Luke 7: 11-17

Sermon: ""Young Man, I Say to You, Rise!"

What a week! I have struggled this week and have wondered about the relevancy of the Gospel Message now, today, June 2010. This week, I found myself asking myself, "What's the point? What good is the message doing?" I began to wonder if anyone was listening, listening to God's word, listening to each other, listening to the cries that are filling our world, listening to sounds of hearts breaking across the world. I even begin wondering if God was listening to the sounds of cries, anger, frustration, hurt, that are filling up God's world. This week, I struggled with the meaning of it all. I struggled and found myself surrounded by and being dragged down by death and darkness.

This week, I found myself traveling a dark road, a hopeless road, a road full of frustrations, a road full of hopelessness, a road filled with despair. A road that was leading me away from life, leading to me darkness, leading me away from possibilities.

I'm not going to tell you that it was just one instance that got my feet started down this path. It was a combination of events. frustration with the news and images about the oil spill. frustration with the questions of why can't we stop the leak. frustrations with our language because the word spill doesn't cover what is going on in the Gulf.

My frustrations weren't just limited to the Gulf area. My frustrations increased with the news that there had been a shooting in England. My frustrations increased with the worries over the economy. My frustrations increased with every passing image and news that the world seems to be falling apart, that chaos is taking over, that the light of the world seems to be dwindling. I found myself as I struggle, wandering this dark path, wondering where God is in all of this mess. and it all led up to the point where I found myself asking: What's the relevancy of the Gospel for people nowadays? How do we say that the Gospel has something to say to a world that is covering its ears and eyes because it is so overwhelmed with hurt, violence, greed, and isolation? why do we share these stories about Jesus that happen two thousand years ago with people who are struggling now? Can that gap of relevancy be bridged?

I found myself on a very dark, a very hopeless, a very despairing road.

And on this road, as I was doing sermon prep, I found the bridge that spanned the gap of two thousand years ago and now. I was reminded of the relevancy of the Gospel message that has been around for generations, that continues today, and will continue for years to come. I found out that God is still calling prophets to restore life from death.

I heard God calling all of us, young old, woman, man, to Rise up and give ourselves to life. "Rise up, young men. Rise up, young women, Rise up, children. Rise up, elders. Death does not have the last word. Life does. Possibilities do. Hope has the last word.

And we find this message in our Scripture today. When we hear these words from Luke, we know that it is a familiar story. A story that can also be found in the Old Testament. A story that

has given hope and new life to believers from the beginning of time, that continues to give new life to believers now, and will continue to give hope and new life to all of God's children for generations to come. Stories that remind us that death does not have the last word.

Just as we remember these stories, Luke's audience would remember them as well and would know what happens next. They would hear how Jesus came upon a widow, grieving the loss of her son, and they would remember that the prophets Elijah and Elisha had done the same thing. They would hear how Jesus gave life to the son, restoring the family's future and security, restoring hope once more and they would remember that Elijah and Elisha had done the same thing years ago. They would understand that they were hearing a message that renewed, restored God's people from death to life then as well as now.

Our Scripture opens up and we find ourselves on the road with Jesus and as he enters the gate, he encounters a funeral procession and not just any funeral procession. This is a funeral procession for a son, the only son, of a woman who has already buried her husband. A funeral procession that leads down a very dark, a very hopeless, a very despairing road. She has already lost her husband and now she is burying her son. She is alone. She is helpless. She has no one to look at for her or help her in any way. She is going down a very dark, a very hopeless, a very disparaging road.

And Jesus walks up to the funeral procession, stands in front of board that is holding the deceased son and lays a hand upon it. And he simply says, "Young man, I say, to you Rise!" New life. Hope. Life has been restored from death.

And the son is given back to his mother. Hope is given back to his mother. Life is given back to the widow. Possibilities are given back to his mother.

The Gospel Message is proclaimed loudly through this simple beautiful story: "Death does not have the last word. God is still working. God is still speaking. God is here, proclaiming hope, proclaiming possibilities, proclaiming hope.

And that is the continuing message of the Gospel that made it relevant two thousand years ago, a hundred years ago, today and will make it relevant two thousand years from now. God has the last word. Hope has the last word. Life has the last word. Life is and can be restored from death. Possibilities will be revived and renewed through the life and grace of God.

Death does not have the last word. And we can firmly proclaim this because we have experienced the resurrection. We hold onto the promises of faith that God will never leave us alone, that God is still working, that God has overcome the grave and God will do so again.

Life will be restored from death. Hope will overcome our frustrations. Possibilities will thrive with the gift of God's grace.

And I feel like a broken record, but what better news or message do we need to share with all of God's children? When the world says this is it, there's no point, there's no hope, we are called to be prophets that will bear the active word of God and say, Rise up! Rise up and be restored to

life from death. Rise up, and see that we can make a difference. Rise up and see that greed, that hate, that violence, that sickness, that despair, that darkness does not have the last word.

That's is what makes the Gospel Message relevant then as well as now. Because we have the blessings and promises of faith. We have experienced the resurrection. And it is a sharp reminder for all of God's children that we cannot darkness lead astray or overwhelm us. We must continue to believe and trust that God is still working, that God is still speaking, that God is still calling us to be prophets.

If it is not relevant for us as believers, than how can a world that is frustrated, that is saying, "What's the point, that is saying why should we believe, why should we trust the Good News, that is saying why should we experience the resurrection in our lives, understand how life-changing, how life-giving, how life-reviving the gifts of grace and love really are and how with just a few words, life can be restored from death?"

Rise up, young men. Rise up, young women. Rise up, children. Rise up, elders. Find hope because our God is an active God, because we proclaim that our God is still working and still speaking, because our God has answered our pleas and has given us salvation. Rise up and find comfort, peace and joy! Rise up and find possibilities. Rise up and find grace.

We are free, free to embrace the good news that "we live in and bear witness to the experience of life, the good, the bad, the ugly and the breath-takingly beautiful. When we rise up and embrace the gift of life that has been restored from death, we realize that we experience life[as people of faith, as people of God] and we find strength, courage, and hope in the fact that God is in control. When we realize that our life is defined by God, God's grace and God's goodness. And we find that "within this [new kind] of life, we are met by the wonder and joy and possibilities of the creative response" of God continuing to work in our world, be a part of our world, to hold those who are suffering in the palm of God's hand, to cry and mourn with those who have lost loved ones, to sing with joy as life is embraced.

Rise up and embrace life. Rise up and restore life from death. Rise up and experience hope. We have been given a new life that is full of the creative possibilities of God. We have been given new life that rest secure in the knowledge that God was with us in the beginning, is with us now, and will always be with us. As people of faith, we experience Life, in all its varied forms: the good, the bad, the ugly and the breath-takingly beautiful. We experience life as children of God always held secure in the knowledge that our God is continuing to work, create, and make all things new.

Rise up, Midway Christian and share the gift of new life by embracing our mission of WELCOME. Rise up Midway Christian and be prophets of change, prophets of peace, prophets of hope. Rise up Midway Christian and say to this world that the Gospel Message is still relevant today just like it was two thousand years ago, just like it will be two thousand years from now.

Rise up, Midway Christian and restore life from death.

May we have the courage to share this life-giving message to all of God's children. Amen.