

1 Kings 17:8-24
Psalm 146

Galatians 1:11-24
Luke 7:11-17

In both our Old Testament reading and our gospel reading we encounter a series of miracles. Our Old Testament reading is about Elijah, a prophet who served God in ancient Israel. Elijah was a rather wild man, brave enough to confront one of Judah's most wicked kings Ahab, and his eviler wife Jezebel. It was this Jezebel from where we get the moniker Jezebel, meaning a morally unrestrained woman. Elijah had told Ahab that there would be a drought and that it would not end until Elijah said so! God advises Elijah to hide because of the growing opposition of Ahab and Jezebel. He is instructed to go to a certain stream. There Elijah will find water and the ravens feed him. This is the first miracle.

Then God sends Elijah to Zarephath, which is on the Mediterranean coast. Elijah is to stay with a widow for whom we are not given a name. The drought had serious consequences for this widow. When Elijah asks for bread, she informs him that she has only enough bread for one final meal, and then she and her son would die of hunger. Elijah tells her to bake the bread for him, and that jar of meal and jug of oil will never be empty. Sure enough, in spite of the drought she never runs out of oil and wheat. There is enough to eat. Our second miracle.

The son of the woman dies and boy is she angry. This was more than just grief. His death spelled trouble for her. To be a widow with no son was to be destitute. Women in that ancient society were dependent upon a man for her livelihood. To not have a husband, and then to lose a son, was the worst situation a woman could find herself. But Elijah raises this woman's son from death. She is no longer destitute. Miracle three.

Our gospel is quite similar. Jesus comes upon a funeral procession. The dead man, like our Old Testament story, is the only son of a widow. She too would now be destitute. Jesus raises this dead son of a widow from death

Incredible. Absolutely incredible. The passages don't use the term, but I would think it is safe to say that both of the mothers thought it was incredible. What happens is amazing. These incredible acts depict God's compassion, especially upon those who are the most vulnerable. As I mentioned, both of these widows lost their only sons. They would now be destitute. They now had no one to support them. The phrase "widows and orphans" is used extensively in the Bible as a catch phrase for the vulnerable. That phrase depicts the most vulnerable.

The fact that we are not given the names of either one of these mothers illustrates that they were "no-bodies," they were marginalized. These two women were so insignificant that we don't know their names. But God is not the God of just the rich and the famous, the powerful. God is not just the God of professional football players making millions, attracting millions of viewers, and praising God after each tackle or touchdown. God extends his care and compassion to the least, to no-name widows. God shows his care and compassion to even us.

Jill Duffield, editor of *The Presbyterian Outlook* shares two stories of God's incredible work. The first one was at a party. She knew the person she found herself talking with, but not well. He wanted to share with her his divine revelation. He even said something along the lines of: You heard, no doubt, of my earlier life. She had. He went on to tell her how he'd had an encounter that had totally transformed his thinking about race and systemic racism and now he couldn't help but share what he now saw.

Like Paul, he didn't care the consequences of sharing his newfound sight. He was ready to use it as God chose. Frankly, she found the reversal, well, incredible.

Then, just days ago, after she had given a "minute for mission" type presentation at a church, a woman she did not know came up to her and said, "I want to tell you something. You are looking at a miracle." She went on to tell Ms. Duffield how she'd lived despite unbelievable odds, how she'd had an encounter with the divine and how now she wakes up every day and prays, "God, please show me how you can use me today." Miss Duffield confessed, some of what she shared, was incredible.

If these texts tell us anything, they tell us that our God is a God who does incredible acts of compassion and life. Our God has particular concern for the world's most vulnerable and the power to bring about resurrection-type reversals. Our God stops to tend to the vulnerable and brings resurrection to people and places overcome with weeping and mourning. Our God brings about resurrection-like reversals, turning Paul who violently persecuted the church of God to one who was willing to be bound and even die for it. Why is it thought incredible that God raises the dead? Or transforms the violent into peacemakers? Or turns mourning to dancing? Or forgives sinners? Or works through the lowly? Or loves the unlovable? Or makes a denier and a coward into the rock upon which the church is built?

As I said, widows with no husband or sons represented those at the bottom of society. They were the most vulnerable and just as God had compassion on the vulnerable, so too are we. God instructs us to welcome the aliens, to care for the sick, to feed the hungry, give shelter to the homeless, clothe the naked, give water to the thirsty, visit the imprisoned. God has not given conditions or requirements that must be met

before these people can receive help. We are to be compassionate. Period. Are we to welcome only the documented alien? Are we to feed the hungry only if they are deserving? Or not feed them because some have abused the system. Are we to turn away the Muslims because we lump them all together as terrorists? I totally understand our concerns. They are legitimate concerns. However, our role as Christians is to put before our leaders God's desire for our nation and the world. I am not a politician. I don't know how to solve these problems from a political perspective. I am a theologian, not a politician. We understand God's vision for the world. Why are we so hesitant to reveal it to others?

A reporter was covering that conflict in the middle of Sarajevo, and he saw a little girl shot by a sniper. The reporter threw down his pad and pencil. He rushed to the man who was holding the child, and helped them both into his car. As the reporter stepped on the accelerator, racing to the hospital, the man holding the bleeding child said, "Hurry, my friend, my child is still alive." A moment or two later, "Hurry, my friend, my child is still breathing." A moment later, "Hurry, my friend, my child is still warm." Finally, "Hurry. Oh, God, my child is getting cold." When they got to the hospital, the little girl was dead. As the two men were in the lavatory, washing the blood off their hands and their clothes, the man turned to the reporter and said, "This is a terrible task for me. I must go tell her father that his child is dead. He will be heartbroken." The reporter was amazed. He looked at the grieving man and said, "I thought she was your child." The man looked back and said, "No, but aren't they all our children?"

How majestic is the name of the Lord our God. Amen!