

**Sermon for 5th June 2015 (Second Sunday after Trinity)**

**1 Kings 17. 8-16; Ps. 146; Gal. 1. 11-end; Luke 7. 11-17**

*May I speak in the name of the living God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

I stand to be corrected, by one or more of the retired revs present, but I think that the raising to life of the son of the widow of Nain is the only instance of Jesus carrying out a miracle without first having been asked or approached for help. He happened on this occasion to come upon a funeral procession, that of a young man who was the only son of his widowed mother. In the Jewish culture of the time, a widow had no inheritance rights, so to lose a beloved child who was also the family breadwinner would reduce her to relying on charity. Whether Jesus was aware of the circumstances, or guessed, or was told, we do not know from Luke's record; all we are told is that ***“when the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her.”*** That compassion led him to immediately stop the procession by touching the bier - in itself an act that would be seen as ritual defilement - and to tell the young man to rise. The man sat up and began to speak - a truly remarkable and totally unexpected miracle. No wonder that those who witnessed it glorified God and said that a great prophet had risen among them. Those who knew their Hebrew scriptures might well have called to mind the story of Elijah who, in a time of great drought, was told by God to go to Zarephath (on the coast near Sidon) where God had designated a widow to feed him; while Elijah was staying there, the widow's only son became ill and died, which the widow blamed on Elijah; however, Elijah took the boy to his bedroom where miraculously the boy revived in response to Elijah's prayer to God. The delighted widow was able to declare that she knew then that Elijah was a man of God.

Is it just a happy coincidence or did Luke expect his readers to draw any conclusion from the fact that this parallel story of Elijah was actually quoted by Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth not long before this incident, when Jesus was challenged by those who knew of his upbringing and he replied that a prophet was not accepted in his home town? Jesus made the point that the widow to whom Elijah had been sent was not an Israelite but a foreigner. He added another reference to the fact that Elisha, Elijah's successor, had healed Naaman the Syrian of a common skin disease, rather than any Israelite. Luke seems to have wanted to draw attention to Jesus's words on that earlier occasion by linking together, as happening on successive days, two miracles performed by Jesus - this bringing to life of a widow's son and the immediately preceding story (which we heard last Sunday) about the healing in absentia of the Roman centurion's servant in answer to a request sent to Jesus. Was this Luke's way of informing his more discerning readers that the gospel message - the good news - that Jesus was preaching, along with the accompanying manifestations of healing, raising from the dead, compassion, love, was intended for all people and not just for the Israelites? This of course becomes clear in Luke's second book, the Acts of the Apostles, first through Peter when he was encouraged to go to Cornelius, another Roman centurion, and then through Paul. Luke had previously, through the words of Simeon when he saw the baby Jesus at his presentation in the temple, declared that Jesus was seen as ***“a light for revelation to the Gentiles”*** as well as for the glory of God's people Israel.

This gospel message was revealed to Paul, he told the Galatians in our epistle reading, directly from Jesus himself and not from any human source. That to his mind put him on an equal footing with the other apostles who had accompanied Jesus during his mission and so had also learnt direct from Jesus what the message was which they were to continue to spread abroad after Jesus had ascended into heaven. That message was that the salvation available through faith in Jesus Christ, crucified, risen and ascended, was there for all and not just for the people of Israel and those who were persuaded that they had to become like Israelites and obey the laws of Moses in order to be saved. Paul was saddened because he had preached successfully to the Galatians and had set up Christian congregations, or churches in that province of Asia Minor. Now, far away from them in Rome, he was receiving news that they were either going back to their old pagan ways or were being persuaded by Jews to become circumcised according to Jewish law and perhaps even to stop believing that Jesus was their Saviour. So we, who have received the good news and have been baptised and confirmed in Christ, must not go backwards and give up on our faith. Rather, we must build on that bedrock of faith and practice day by day what we have been taught it means to be a disciple of Christ, namely to love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength and to love our neighbours as ourselves. This involves acting with compassion, giving of our time, talents and possessions to assist those who are less well off than we are or who are in especial need, such as asylum seekers or refugees, and praying. In engaging in these ways with our neighbours, without discriminating between fellow Christians and those of other faiths or none, we each in our own individual way can show God's love to the world, as displayed in such glorious and powerful manner by Jesus during his time on earth as man.

***To God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, be ascribed all blessing, honour, glory and power, now and for evermore. Amen.***