

Luke 7.11-17

Trinity 2: 5th June 2016

Jesus, Elijah, and an old man are playing a round of golf and they are all level at the last hole. The first to tee off is Elijah. He hits the ball well, but it's caught by a blast of wind and starts heading right for the lake before the green. Elijah pulls a face, and then raises his club, so that the water parts, and the ball rolls right through and back onto the fairway. Jesus and the old man look at him, eyebrows raised. "I was just putting it back on course" he protests. Jesus steps up next, and has a really good swing, but he tops the ball and it runs straight down the hill towards the lake. Jesus pulls a face, closes his eyes and prays. Miraculously, as the ball hits the water, rather than plunging in, it rolls across the surface, as if on ice, and ends up back on the fairway. Elijah and the old man look disapprovingly at Jesus this time. "I was going to walk over it later anyway, he protests". Shaking his head, the old man steps forward to take his shot, but he slices the ball off the tee and it veers straight towards the water. However, just as it is about to land, a fish jumps up from the water, swallowing the ball, just as an eagle drops from the sky, grabbing the fish. Then, as the eagle flies over the green towards its nest, a bolt of lightning strikes the eagle, making it drop the fish. And as the fish hits the green, it spits out the ball, which drops neatly into the hole. The old man smiles and chuckles, but Jesus and Elijah are not impressed. Jesus turns to him and says, "Really dad, we all like to win but if you keep doing this we won't bring you next time!"

And may I speak in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Well good morning, it is wonderful to be with you again. I am glad you liked my joke, but there is a point to it, because our gospel this morning deliberately draws a parallel between Jesus and Elijah. Although, unlike my joke, the gospel story is no laughing matter. Jesus' miracle is no cheap conjuring trick. Because a boy has died, and he has left his widowed mother without any source of income or status, or security. In first century Palestine, that kind of situation was seriously unfunny.

Because although it was the boy who had physically died, it was also a kind of death for his mother. Not physically, but in terms of her ability to live within such a patriarchal society. Not only did she have to grieve the untimely death of her boy, but she would have also lost her home and her income, these were not permissible for a lone woman to possess. And so the story is also an account of the woman's own resurrection and restoration. Yet the focus of this account is not on the woman, or even on her son who is raised. We do not even know their names, and neither of them are reported to say anything at all. They do not ask Jesus for help, and they do not reply to any of his words. Rather, the focus of this account is about who Jesus really is and what he is like.

For this great miracle has a direct parallel in the Hebrew Bible. Elijah, who was considered one of the greatest Hebrew prophets also performed many miracles, including parting waters like Moses did, and raising a widow's son from the dead. So this miracle marked Jesus out as a mighty prophet, as great as Moses or Elijah. He was following in their footsteps and doing the things they did.

And lots of people acknowledge this about him. They say that Jesus was a great man, a good teacher, even a doer of miraculous deeds. They even call him a prophet. And that is what many of the crowd thought after they had witnessed this miracle. They even said of Jesus "a great prophet has risen among us!"

But if we stop here, believing Jesus to be merely a great prophet, like many others that we might admire throughout history, then we have missed an important part of the story. Because although Luke is deliberately comparing Jesus to Elijah, he also wants to leave you in absolutely no doubt that Jesus was greater than Elijah.

Now let's remember that for a Jew in 1st C Palestine, the idea that someone might be greater than Moses or Elijah would have been just as incomprehensible, as it would be for us to hear there might be someone greater than Jesus. It was simply unthinkable. But if we compare the account of Elijah's resurrection miracle in 1 Kings 17 with this one, we can see a significant difference.

In 1 Kings, Elijah prays to God 3 times, pleading to God for the life of the child. Jesus does not pray, he simply commands the boy to 'Arise'. Elijah is described as stretching himself out upon the boy to heal him, hardly recommendable, but Jesus simply speaks to the boy in the presence of all the crowd. Elijah's child then took a while to come around. But in Luke's gospel account, the boy from Nain sits up right away.

You see, the author of the Gospel of Luke wants us to be assured that Jesus himself knows who he is. Jesus knows what authority he has over creation. If it were not so, his words would be outrageously arrogant, blasphemous and ultimately ineffective. But Jesus was, and is, the Son of God. And as such, he had God's authority over creation. He did not need to pray to God for a miracle, he was the maker of this miracle.

And while Elijah was responding to a request from the widow, as indeed Jesus did on many other occasions. In this story, Jesus was merely passing by and saw a widow who had lost everything and his heart went out to her and caused him to respond and intervene. How many times have we experienced God's love coming to us, before we even knew he was there?

So our challenges this morning, have we truly recognised Jesus, as one greater than any prophet, God incarnate? And for those of us who have recognised Jesus, how good are we at respond to people in need as we pass them in the street? Do we enact and embody Jesus' compassion?

Amen

Rev'd Ann Lynes