

Wisdom and Transformation
I Kings 17: 8 -16; Luke 7:11-17
June 6, 2010

It is becoming more and more difficult to turn on the television these days and especially to actually try and watch the news. It all seems quite bad, doesn't it? Many media outlets have even been covering the recent announcement of Al and Tipper Gore's separation. Who separates after 40 years of marriage? Those on the street who were interviewed following this news in essence asked "Is there hope for our own marriages if these two can't make it work?" Further, we are inundated with news of one natural disaster after another, the BP oil spill continues now some 48 days later and it is heart breaking to see the animals that have died as a consequence of this disaster and all the natural habitat that has been destroyed. We had a major sink hole that just consumed an entire building in Guatemala. The folks in Haiti are still trying to recover from that devastating earthquake months ago. It's hard to find messages of hope and promise. Yet, that is what our gospel lesson shares with us today. In the grace of God and compassion of Jesus the Christ, there is life and there is hope.

We have Jesus entering the city of Nain. As he is entering we have a funeral procession of a dead son being carried out of the city accompanied by his mother along with others mourning his death. Death and despair are greeted by life, compassion, and hope. A son is restored, a mother is comforted, and a community is transformed because of the compassionate act of Jesus. The Greek word used for "compassion" in our text goes much deeper than our understanding of the word. It literally means that Jesus had a physical reaction to what he was seeing. Some translate it to a feeling in his gut, a visceral response to the widow's grief. Compassion as written here is akin more literally to our platitude of "I feel your pain." Jesus felt for this mother not just emotionally, but physically. Something awful had happened and God's grace interceded to restore order in the midst of everyone's pain. You would think there would

be much rejoicing, right, and shouts of hallelujah? No, what we find is that the hand of God's grace has initially caused the people to fear.

¹⁶*Fear seized all of them; and they glorified God, saying, 'A great prophet has risen among us!' and 'God has looked favourably on [God's] people!'* (Luke 7) Perhaps there was some wisdom in their fearing at first. After all, when God has touched our lives we are changed by the experience. There is an expectation that as new creations we will share with the world around us the gift of God's grace. There is the expectation that our lives will reflect the Good News of God's love that has touched and transformed us. "We are to be different because Christ is in us. The world is to be different because we are in it."¹ We are to be change agents. Not just hearers, but doers of God's word.

How do we live out this transformation in courage and not in fear? We do it by choosing to trust in the wisdom given to us. Not second guessing ourselves all the time and not second guessing God. In calling me, you all as a congregation at first had to trust that it was in fact God who called me into ministry. Next you had to trust that it was God who started and it is God who continues to do the work of equipping me for ministry. You also had to trust that ours was and remains a ministry of mutual responsibility. It is wisdom that says to us move beyond fear and doubt to standing in faith.

Wisdom calls us to know ourselves, to squeeze out of every moment in life whatever lessons it holds for us, whatever responses it demands at that time.² She has been given to us in the midst of our suffering to help us persevere and endure those times in our lives individually and communally when we are unsure of what is happening Wisdom is given to us to endure the birth pangs of new life and change.

In today's gospel lesson, new life was granted this young man, his mother, and the larger community of Nain. Wisdom, here, reveals to us how the act of Jesus touching one person not

¹ Roger Gustafson. "Change the World" www.goodpreacher.com

² Joan Chittister. "Wisdom: A Gift or a Task?" Program 4108. November 23, 1996

only changed him, but changed an entire community. God touches us not for our own benefit, but for the benefit and good of the greater community. Fear says to us that as individuals we have no power and can do little to affect our community and the world around us. It is wisdom who says to us that is not true. Wisdom tells us that when your life has been transformed by the healing hand of Jesus, you have within you the ability to affect change in the lives of others around you, in the life of your community, and in the world. God's call upon our lives to be in service, to love one another, to share the Good News, to stand in faith is not an empty call, rather it is filled with the wisdom that God continues to equip us individually and communally to live out that which is being asked of us. We are called to live our lives as children of God. We are called to live our lives as a family.

Lauren Winner asks this question, "What would it mean to place strong social commitments at the center of our families? To view our families and homes not as refugees from the world, not as places of retreat and coziness, but as places of discipleship? What would it look like to practice a radical kind of parenting in which [parents] understood that their primary job was not to help children get ahead, get into Ivy League colleges, get a firm toehold in the middle class but rather that the primary task of parents was to help nurture followers of Christ who, like Elijah before him, noticed and ate with and healed and gave new life to outsiders?"³

I would like to reframe that question for us: What would it mean for us as the people of Peace to place strong social commitments at the center of our ministry? What would it mean to view our church not merely as a refuge from the world, not as a place of retreat and coziness, but as a place of discipleship? What would it look like to practice a radical kind of hospitality and ministry welcoming to all that says this is not merely a place where you come and get filled and nurtured, but it is a place that expects you to carry that out into the world by being in service for God helping to heal others and giving new life to outsiders?

³ Exegesis. Luke 7:11-17. www.goodpreacher.com

In order for us to live out this type of hospitality and ministry, inviting others to join us, we must first seek the counsel of wisdom which says, if you are going to invite people to join you, you must first know your own story. Who are we as the people of Peace UCC? How has our faith been impacted by the hand of God upon our lives? Who is God calling us to be? Where is wisdom guiding us? We must know our own story if we are going to ask others to join us.

Wisdom also says if we are going to invite others to join in our faith walk we must know what it is to be people of faith. It was not that Jesus merely restored life to this young man, again, Jesus restored life to the community by being present to each of them and revealing the truth of who he was to them and is to us not by speaking it, but by living the truth. He is the word of God made flesh. As we read today's story we find that no one asked Jesus to act. He saw a need and he chose to intervene. He was intentional about sharing the love of God and extending God's grace to all those present. As people of faith we must be intentional about our study of the scriptures, intentional about our seeking to know and understand the teachings of Jesus so that we can be intentional in living them out. Wisdom says that to be in relationship we must give of ourselves and give of our time just as our teacher, Jesus did.

Jesus called out and the young man arose. He moved from death to life and his community was transformed with him. Their hope was restored by the compassionate act of Jesus. Jesus daily helps us to move from death to life anew in him. He calls us to intercede in the lives of one another, to be change agents. We have within us the ability to do that which is asked of us standing in faith, not fear. What would it look like to practice a radical kind of hospitality and ministry welcoming to all that says this is not merely a place where you come and get filled and nurtured, but it is a place that expects you to carry that out into the world by being in service for God helping to heal others and giving new life to outsiders? Amen.