

"Do Not Weep"

1 Kings 17:17-24 & Luke 7:11-17

June 10, 2007

Well - here we are again. It is great to be back with you for worship. I do miss you all when I am gone. And with the beautiful weather, it is easy to understand why many would find compelling reasons to be out doing other things. Still it is great to be back with you for worship. Last Friday and Saturday I had the opportunity to attend the Synod Assembly in Bismarck and share in the business of the larger church. I am thankful that Reuben Mayer was able to go as our congregations delegate. Often the business of the church is challenging / even difficult - this year it was how should I put it it was pretty low key with budgets and salary guidelines topping the business agenda. There were great Bible Study and worship opportunities and we were able to hear reports from ELCA national representatives and many different agencies and organizations. It was good - but nothing, shall we say 'earth shattering'. But then as I thought about it, I wondered - what is it that we would find to be 'earth shattering' or exciting in our world today? We have so much high drama in our world. Through our media it almost seems as though nothing in the reality of our daily lives can live up to what the media brings into our living rooms every day. And it all becomes a bit 'surreal'. We listen to dramatic news events unfold around our world - we watch the exciting movies and talk about the characters as though they are real people. I had a chance to sit with my nephew in Rapid City last week. He was preparing to go to see the third part of the Pirates of the Caribbean movie trilogy without having seen part two. So I tried to fill him in on what had happened to 'Captain Jack Sparrow' and his ship 'the Black Pearl' as though they were real people and real events. We spoke knowledgeably about the battle for the dead man's chest and Captain Jack's fate. It was all quite exciting - but we knew it was not real - just a story - yet, Synod Assembly business could not stack up to it in terms of excitement or earth shaking importance. I found myself wondering where the reading of scriptures and worship fits into the picture for you and me. Is it real or surreal? Is it earth shaking or boring {oops, I wasn't going to use that word}?

What is real and exciting in your world today? Will we dismiss as unimportant and unexciting the real life that we have the privilege to live out? Will we trudge through real life and prefer the stories that are pure fiction? Will we dismiss reality as fiction / maybe even boring stuff at that and choose to live in an unreal world?

Today we have before us two very similar stories in the Gospel text and our first scripture reading from 1 Kings. They are exciting and real. Some skeptics might debate the reality of Biblical stories - some might want to classify it in the same genera as the movies, except that they are really outdated and lacking in special effects. Some certainly dismiss the stories we have heard even more quickly than we would dismiss a Hollywood movie. But we hold to the truth of the Bible and they are real - they are exciting. And they have a word for us that we need to hear.

In both scriptures a young man has died. We do not know a lot of details - we do not know exactly what age either young man is but each story hinges around that tragic event. And we must also note that the tragedy is all the more profound because each of the mothers involved were widows. Widows and orphans were the most vulnerable members of that society. They often had very little by means of a way of making a living or supporting themselves. I suspect that the mother and son knew how much they needed to do in order to simply survive in their world. I suspect that they both knew how much they needed to depend on others as well as on each other. But now, in both stories, the son dies and the emptiness and desperation is complete for the mother.

Into the OT story Elijah enters. He had been staying with the widow and her son. He had come at a time when their food supply was at an end and the woman believed that there was enough for only one meal for her and her son and then they would prepare to die. But Elijah proved the word of God true as the food never ran out. Still, now as the breath left her son, she doubted and turned on God and Elijah in anger. But the compassion and power of God turned everything around and the boy was returned to life.

In the Gospel, Jesus just happened to be traveling through the town of Nain as the funeral procession was going to the cemetery. In compassion for the weeping widow, Jesus stopped the procession and told the woman to stop weeping. We are not told how she responded, but I can not imagine that she simply said 'OK' and allowed her mood to change. I can only imagine the tears continuing to flow and bewilderment - even anger added to the tears. How can such a request be honored - how could it be possible for anything to change so that the tears would not continue?

No - I can't imagine the widow who had lost her only son responding very well to the command of Jesus. But the son did. In an unbelievable command of Jesus for the young man to arise there is an immediate response. It is earth shattering. It is exciting beyond words for a weeping widow who's tears would now finally respond to Jesus.

So, what is real in our world. What do we find to be earth shaking and exciting. I don't know how Captain Jack Sparrow and the 'Black Pearl' survived the grasp of the giant octopus that crushed and swallowed them at the end of part two and I have not seen how they escape the death grip of Davy Jones. It will be exciting but it is only a movie. What we are dealing with - what we have the high privilege of

hearing in God's word is real and true. It comes as a word of hope and comfort to the many who's eyes have been filled with tears. It comes as a word of promise to those who have made that journey to the cemetery and to those who live day to day wondering about the future. It is a word of life to all of us.

What is real and earth shattering? Is the word of God so exciting for you to hear because you know it is true and you will respond to it? When Jesus says, "Do not weep!" will you respond?

AMEN