

The Third Sunday After Pentecost
June 13, 2010
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

1 Kings 17:17-24

Some time later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing. She said to Elijah, "What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?" "Give me your son," Elijah replied. He took him from her arms, carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed. Then he cried out to the LORD, "O LORD my God, have you brought tragedy also upon this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?" Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried to the LORD, "O LORD my God, let this boy's life return to him!" The LORD heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived. Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house. He gave him to his mother and said, "Look, your son is alive!" Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth." (NIV)

"On a scale of 1 to 10, describe the pain you're feeling - with 1 being no pain at all, and 10 being the worst pain you can imagine." That's a question people often hear in a doctor's office or hospital today. But it was not a question that many old-fashioned medical practitioners used to ask because back in the old days pain was taken for granted and considered a part of life. Wasn't much anyone could do about it, so no one wasted time trying. There were no anesthetics. If you were injured on a Civil War battlefield, and the surgeon was walking toward you with amputation saw in hand, the words "*bite the bullet*" were more than just a familiar expression. But nowadays things are very different. There is even a whole field of medicine called "*pain management*." More and more, doctors are finding ways to treat pain and give comfort to those who are suffering.

Yet, there is a kind of pain that still registers a 10, which all the medicine in the world can't cure, even a little. There is still a cause of suffering and hurt that is as painful today as it has always been. If you haven't felt this suffering, this pain, this loss, you will if the good Lord keeps you on this earth long enough. This is because "*sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned*" (Romans 5). What causes more pain in this world than death? Whether you lose a loved who falls asleep in bed at 100 years old, or a someone close is taken away from you in their prime, dealing with the pain and loss of death is never easy. So I pray we sit up and take notice because the Lord wants to teach us a thing or two about death this morning. I pray through His Word our eyes are opened and our hearts are moved to confess: "*Now I know,*" - **Now I know the truth about death.**

When the people of his hometown Nazareth were rejecting Jesus as the Messiah because of their familiarity with Him, Jesus warned them by giving them a history lesson saying: "*I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon*" (Luke 4).

This is the context of our text and where Elijah is now. Because of King Ahab's wickedness and the gross idolatry of the people, the prophet of God had to flee his home country of Israel. God sent Elijah to a brook where he drank and God had the ravens provide food for him. But after a while the brook dried up and God told Elijah to go to Zarephath where a widow would supply him with food during the famine. There Elijah met a widow who was on her last handful of flour and few drops of oil to make enough for her son and her before they starved to death. But Elijah gave her God's promise that: ***'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD gives rain on the land.'*** So she listened and every day the Lord miraculously provided the daily bread for this widow, her son, and Elijah,

Now we read: ***"Some time later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing. She said to Elijah, "What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?"*** Do you have this picture clear in your mind? The son of this widow got sick, very sick, and finally so sick that he died. This mom picks up her boy in her arms and stands before Elijah. She speaks words of anger and hurt and bitterness. Words that, at times, even come from the mouths of God's people due to the pain of death. ***"Why? Why did you come to my house? What business do you have here?"*** The Hebrew is difficult to translate into English but she basically asks: ***"Why did you come here to bring my sin to remembrance with God and kill my son?"*** She felt that before the prophet's arrival, she was perhaps insignificant enough to have escaped God's notice. But felt once Elijah came into her life, she came under God's scrutiny and God saw her sin, and as a result her son is dead. She saw in this death her guilt and inability to measure up to God's righteous standards. Now she knew. Now she could say I know the truth about death. The wages of sin is death.

It has been said that there is not a preacher more powerful than death. It is enough to make almost anyone listen or take notice. What could be a more harsh preaching of the law than a lifeless body laid into a casket and then in the ground? That's the result of our sin. In death all our evil thoughts, and hurtful and angry words, and disobedient actions come to light for what they are - sins. In death we are seen for what we are - sinners. Death not only reminds us of who we are, but of what we need - a Savior from sin - a deliverer from death.

I pray each of us sees death and says: ***"Now I know. Now I know the guilt of my sins and what they deserve. Now I know the truth about death."*** But God allows us to see another truth. Death does not have to end in pain, hurt, anger, and bitterness. ***"Give me your son," Elijah replied. He took him from her arms, carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed. Then he cried out to the LORD, "O LORD my God, have you brought tragedy also upon this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?" Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried to the LORD, "O LORD my God, let this boy's life return to him!"*** Elijah carries this dead boy into the upper room, lays him on the bed and begins to pray. When we do not know what we ought to pray for we have the promise that the Holy Spirit will intercede for us with groans that words cannot express. I imagine this as one of those times.

Elijah calls to the Lord - the God of free and faithful love - the God of the promise. He cries out to His God. He knows that it is God who allowed this to happen.

He acknowledges: ***“O LORD my God...you have brought this tragedy.”*** But what he asks is: “why?” Why would God spare the lives of this widow and her son and himself in this foreign land only to take her son away from her now? Why would tragedy come upon this woman who opened her home to God’s prophet and began to learn and grow in the knowledge of the one true God? So three times Elijah stretches himself over the boy and urgently pleads for the boy’s life to return to him.

“The LORD heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived. Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house. He gave him to his mother and said, "Look, your son is alive!" Try to imagine this! The Lord had mercy on them. He hears the cry of His prophet and the boy’s life returns. The prophet simply picks up the child, gives him back to his mother, and says: ***"Look, your son is alive!"*** Seeing her son alive the woman proclaims: ***"Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth."*** She says: ***"Now I know."*** ***"Now I know you come from God. Now I know that all the words of your God are true. Now I know that not even death is too great for the Lord - the God of the promise."***

Isn’t this also the truth about death that you and I know by faith? We have a God and a Savior who has power, even over death. We have another example of God’s power over death in our Gospel this morning. Did you notice the difference between what Elijah does here and what Jesus did for the widow at Nain? Elijah prayed for the Lord to restore life for this boy. But Jesus just simply spoke the Word. Jesus looked at the dead widow’s son and said: ***"Young man, I say to you, get up!"*** Why? Because only God can raise the dead and Jesus is God. Jesus is God’s Son, His sinless Son.

Jesus is not only the Son of God, but also the Son of Man. He is the only human to live without sin. He is the only person to live on earth who didn’t deserve death. So why, if the truth is the wages of sin is death, did Jesus suffer so horribly and die such an awful death on the cross? Why, if Jesus was God’s sinless Son, was His lifeless body laid into a grave? Dear friends, we know why don’t we? He was delivered over to death because of our sins. All this happened to Jesus, as the writer of Hebrews puts it: ***“so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil--and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”*** (2) Jesus suffered, died, and was buried to pay for our sin so we don’t have to pay the spiritual or eternal consequences of them. When Jesus was raised from the dead on the third day He was revealed as the Savior ***“who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel”*** (2 Timothy 1).

While there still are no medicines in the world to ease the pain of death, there is the one and only Savior who teaches us the truth about death and is there to comfort us in all our sorrows. Even this last enemy named death has been defeated because of Him. Our death is but the gate to heaven. Now anytime anyone falls asleep in Jesus’ name we can look at death and say: ***"Death has been swallowed up in victory. "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"*** (1 Corinthians 15) May we be filled with the same joy and trust as this widow in Zarephath for one day our graves will be just as empty as our Saviors. Then we will say ***"Now I know. Now I know the truth about death."*** Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

