

"You Need New Life"
Luke 7:11-17

(5 June 16)

This reading is happening here today.

That may sound surprising, that I'd try to claim that a Bible story about a dead son coming to life is taking place in our midst today. I understand that surprise; it sounded surprising not just in the miracle itself, but even in another precedent, in a previous declaration of that statement, originally from Jesus. In Luke chapter 4, back in January, we heard Jesus reading from a Bible passage. He went on to declare, "Today this is fulfilled in your hearing." And now I'm again making the same sort of proclamation.

Or in the verses right after this Gospel reading, John the Baptist sends some messengers to Jesus to ask, "Are you the one, or are we still waiting?" Jesus replied, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."

And so for you, who arrive here today wondering what God is up to, if Jesus is active and involved, or if we're all just waiting, waiting for something to happen, yearning for something different, as you arrive here with those questions and those outlooks, again comes the message: see and hear! The dead are raised!

But at that point, you may not only be surprised; you may be confused, or on the edge of breaking Jesus' warning against being offended. You may be turning around a bit in

your seat, trying to spot what's going on, looking somewhat skeptically for the mark of death in our midst. You may wonder where this body is that is being brought back from the brink, back to life. Not spotting a coffin here, nor seeing anybody who looks extraordinarily listless or worse than sick and tired amid our community this morning, you may think about giving up on glimpsing the one in need of life. Or you may try to give it a go with your other senses, and try to catch a whiff, wrinkling your nose, sniffing if there's a stench of death like at the tomb of Lazarus. Go ahead. Inhale deeply. Can you smell it?

Nope. All you're going to smell is diapers. When I proclaim that this reading is happening here and now, that the dead are being given new life, that this is all fulfilled in our midst, you need look no further than Silas Patrick getting ready for his baptism. Or, more truly, he's not getting ready and is pretty oblivious to what we're saying or declaring that God is doing around him. But maybe even more so, that is the fulfillment of this reading.

See, there are some pretty nice parallels, aren't there? There was a son in the Bible reading, and Silas is a son. Check. There was a mother in the Bible reading and Silas has two mothers. Check and check again! A bonus! In the Bible story was a large crowd, tagging along, and here you are! A crowd! Check! It says the crowd glorified God, which you've already been doing in song. Check!

Still, you may protest and notice that all the details aren't exactly the same. I mean, probably foremost on your mind is that a dead son in the ancient culture of Palestine meant that

the mothers' sole source of support, her social security of the day, was gone, and her own life was placed at risk. Even if it wasn't foremost on your mind, you likely don't suspect that's the case for Christa and Anna today.

Maybe that's because, secondly, you're noticing another discrepancy, that this was an only son of the mother in the Bible reading, but we very definitely and truly have Freya here also, so you've probably started to think that that detail is not the same.

Oh, and...anything else? Ah, yes, right. Silas is demonstrably not dead. And if he's already alive, how can I proclaim that he's being raised to new life? Yet I will persist in saying that even here and now today, Jesus is still calling out, just exactly as he did in our Bible reading, "Young man, I say to you, rise!" He is calling this young man, Silas Patrick, to newness of life.

This is inevitably paired with another word from Jesus: "Do not weep." Now, even if there hadn't been a sense of sorrow and loss leading up to baptism this morning, there could've been. See, some of the old possibilities are taken away. If Silas is called to new life, to a Jesus life, to the commitment to "care for others and the world God made and to work for justice and peace" as we'll state in the baptism service, well then he shouldn't ever expect he can persist in selfishness or greed or immorality or judgmentalism or disregard or ignoring mystery or any sin. His life is no longer his own. He is called to love and generosity and justice and righteousness, to live rightly, to bear all those fruits of the Spirit we'll hear about in a couple weeks.

Even more than that, this is the work of

Jesus, to make us well, to give us life, to call us into a new way of living. It may seem more remarkable in the Bible story that he's doing it with someone who had literally died—who had no pulse and no breath in him or any of that—but maybe we should reverse our thinking. Maybe that death is a blank canvas with an ease of a fresh start. Maybe it's harder with a kicking, screaming, rambunctious baby. If baptism is both a dying and a rising, someone who's already dead is already halfway there and won't protest much. But you've already started down that path of being offended, arguing that Silas is alive just fine, thank you very much, and doesn't need to be created anew because he's adorably cute just as he is, and that, further, you yourself check out with vital statistics and so would be pleased to go about your business and keep giving it a shot with your old life and must not fully need this surprising word from Jesus.

And yet, here it comes, interrupting your thinking and disturbing your self-content and raising you to new life anyway. Young man, young woman, sisters, brothers, all of you gathered here today, Jesus invites, calls, demands, saying to you, Rise! This is the word of your baptism, a word with which the Spirit has been tenaciously marking you and filling you and daily renewing you ever since that little splash that originally went with the word. Resurrection was fulfilled for you, and it still is, day by day, to your dying day, but then, of course, even beyond that. Jesus, who left the tomb at Easter, who won't let sleeping dogs lie, certainly won't abandon you to death, not now when its rotten grasp is trying to claim you, not

in a grave, not ever.

That is part of why we baptize Silas Patrick today, so that this promise from God may abide with him throughout his life, so that each morning when he rises from sleep, he may be reminded with you that it is also a call to rise to newness of life, to Jesus life, to God-filled and Spirit-held life.

That also points to the other important proclamation of this Bible reading reiterated here today for Silas. After the word of Jesus called the young man, the son, to rise, then it says "he gave him to his mother." Jesus doesn't call you out from death into life just to send you on your merry way, to do as you please, to enjoy the freedom, to gloat in the face of death.

Today, as he calls Silas to new life, he proceeds to give him to his mothers. Silas has life in order to live rightly as a son, perhaps the primary vocation he's fulfilling these days (though he's also a little brother and a grandson and a cousin, and also a witness to all of us, an embodied proclamation of Jesus' word today). So through this word, Jesus the Creator again makes Silas a son, restoring him to his rightful place, sending him not just back into life, but back into relationships and community and to be a blessing for creation. In the concluding words of our hymn, this baptism and all the work of Jesus in our lives is to "make us whole," to make us fully what we should be, not just as individuals, but all together, wholly.

Hymn: *Crashing Waters at Creation* (ELW #455)