

The Rev. Dr. Mary Barber

10.5.25 - Evensong

And Jesus gave him to his mother.

The miracle story we heard in today's second reading is dramatic, almost cinematic. The crowd of supporters and mourners processing out of town to the cemetery. The grieving mother. The dead body with the pall bearers.

And then, Jesus, approaching the woman, comforting her. Jesus touching the bier. The dead man sitting up and speaking! I can almost imagine the light breaking through on the scene, and the music swelling.

And Jesus gave him to his mother.

A dead man rising. It is fantastical and otherworldly. It is hard to imagine such a thing really happening in our world today.

The miracle is hard to believe. But the suffering seems very relatable.

The widow has lost her husband. Her one son is her only support, the only person keeping her from starving in the street. When she loses him also, she loses everything. She is grieving the loss of her beloved child, and also terrified of how she will survive without him.

Such suffering may be relatable for some of us here. We may have experienced a devastating loss -- the death of a friend or loved one, the end of a marriage, the sudden loss of a job, an unexpected illness. Whatever it was for us, it turned our world upside down, we were in shock, unsure of how we could possibly go on in this new reality. We felt completely alone and helpless.

And Jesus gave him to his mother.

Some of us here, some of us can say that we experienced a loss like that of the widow in this story, and some of us, a few of us, can say that we also experienced Jesus, Jesus coming to us in the middle of that loss. Jesus having compassion for us. Jesus telling us it would be okay again. Jesus touching the bier, and Jesus showing us the way to a new life.

Maybe our person seemed lost, but recovered. Maybe we returned to good health. Maybe we reconciled with our spouse. Or maybe these things did not happen, but we found new life in a different way. We felt the presence of the person we had lost, around or inside us. We found a new way to be in our changed body. We moved through our pain and grief and anger, to something newer, something free and whole.

If we think about it, some of us may have experienced a taste of the miraculous, the fantastical, the otherworldly. Some of us have had an encounter with Jesus, some of us have found a new life when we thought it was all over, some of us have experienced resurrection.

Jesus gave him to his mother.

I am thinking of this story today and wondering something I hadn't thought about before. I am wondering, what killed the son? What killed the only son of the widow, what illness or accident or tragedy almost wiped out this family?

What killed the son? Was it an act of gun violence, one of the many we have been experiencing, so many that we barely register the latest story in the news? Was the son out working and killed in a flood, killed by extreme weather in this new era of climate change? Was the son unable to access a vaccine, or medication, or health insurance, and died of an otherwise treatable illness? Was he taken away to a detention center by ICE, where he died of abuse or neglect?

What killed the son? Who killed the son? I'm finding myself wanting to know what happened, wanting to know who is responsible.

And when I think about it, when I reflect and read this passage and pray on it and watch the news, the news that feels very bleak right now, with the government shut down and wars continuing to rage and people so divided that we are unable to speak with neighbors or members of our own family -- when I reflect on all of this, I have to realize that we are all responsible for the death of the widow's son.

We are all responsible for letting things get so out of hand, we are all responsible for the wars and divisions and guns and fires and floods. We have not spoken loudly enough or worked enough for change, we have allowed the starvation and neglect and disease and descent into violence and isolation we are experiencing right now.

Oh, we have not just done nothing. Many of us have prayed and wept and walked with the widows of our time. But as the dead bodies keep coming, being part of the large crowd is not enough.

Witnessing is not enough. We are called to do more. We are called to get close to the widow, to be moved with compassion. We are called to be more like Jesus.

We are called to be more like Jesus. And yet, we know we are not Jesus. Turning things around, bringing healing to all the sons in our present world, it just feels like an impossible task. We have no idea where to even start.

When we feel hopeless about our times, when we feel powerless to act, we can think about our own resurrections. Who has touched us with compassion? Who opened a door, or opened our eyes to something new? We can remember who Jesus was for us in our own story of new life. And we can begin to see what we can do to be Jesus for the widows we see around us right now.

What can we, as individuals and citizens and churches and the Body of Christ do, in this time, to heal the son? How can we get close, how can we touch the bier?

We must pray and reflect and dream about these questions, we must pray fiercely, because right now we are being called with haste to be like Jesus with the widow. We are being called to touch the bier, and to give all the sons back to their mother.

We must pray and reflect, and dream about this scene. We must visualize it clearly, the son getting up, the sky breaking open with light, the music swelling. And then, we must go out from this place, and act. Amen.