

## **June 6, 2010, The Second Sunday after Pentecost**

O God, from whom all good proceeds: Grant that by your inspiration we may think those things that are right, and by your merciful guiding may do them; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

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### **1 Kings 17:8-16 (17-24)**

The word of the LORD came to Elijah, saying, "Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you." So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, "Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink." As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, "Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." But she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die." Elijah said to her, "Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. For thus says the LORD the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the LORD sends rain on the earth." She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah.

[After this, the son of the woman, the mistress of the house at Zarephath, became ill; his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. She then said to Elijah, "What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to cause the death of my son!" But he said to her, "Give me your son." He took him from her bosom, carried him up into the upper chamber where he was lodging, and laid him on his own bed. He cried out to the LORD, "O LORD my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I am staying, by killing her son?" Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried out to the LORD, "O LORD my God, let this child's life come into him again." The LORD listened to the voice of Elijah; the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. Elijah took the child, brought him down from the upper chamber into the house, and gave him to his mother; then Elijah said, "See, your son is alive." So the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth."]

### **Galatians 1:11-24**

I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it. I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus.

Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days; but I did not see any other apostle except James the Lord's brother. In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie! Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, and I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea that are in Christ; they only heard it said, "The one who formerly was persecuting us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy." And they glorified God because of me.

### **Luke 7:11-17**

Soon after healing the centurion's slave, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went with him. As he approached the gate of the town, a man who had died was being carried out. He was his mother's only son, and she was a widow; and with her was a large crowd from the town. When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and said to her, "Do not weep." Then he came forward and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, rise!" The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Fear seized all of them; and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen among us!" and "God has looked favorably on his people!" This word about him spread throughout Judea and all the surrounding country.

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"Think right and do right." That is the theme for today.

It comes from the Collect for the Day:

*O God, from whom all good proceeds: Grant that by your inspiration we may think those things that are right, and by your merciful guiding may do them . . . .*

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But you and I know that neither thinking right nor doing right is easy. They don't come easy and it is not easy to do them.

Still thinking those things that are right and by God's merciful guidance doing them is today's theme.

Consider the fact that we shall shortly call Joan Jacobowsky forward to recognize and offer prayers with her over her past work and future work in Education for Ministry. Thinking right and doing right are very much on her mind and in our prayers.

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Consider the fact that we shall shortly in our Prayers of the People hold before God and ourselves the many people whom we care for, some far from us and, as in the case of Bea Ackenbaum Kelly, Tom Druga, or John Lockwood, some very close to us. What is it that is right to think of and to do for them?

Or consider the fact that we as a parish in transition, as a parish looking for a permanent rector, and as a parish that has completed its Parish Profile should think and do in the months ahead as we wait for the fruits of our efforts?

Thinking and doing the right is, as I said a moment ago, never easy. This is in part because it's such a broad, almost toss away phrase, like what we might say to a young person or was not too long ago the message given by the "What would Jesus do?" movement. It becomes an almost pat, mantra type way of approaching things as if there were one and only one way of thinking and doing that with the right conditions will lead everyone to agreement and action. On the other hand, there are some ways of approaching things in a pat way that can lead to agreement. For example, if we by the ethical reasoning that the end does not justify the means, we might be closer to agreement with others that our bulletin announcement that Ending Torture is our Nation's Unfinished Business.

Thinking and doing the right are still never easy.

Consider First Kings. It is the story of the Widow of Zarephath, that wonderful story that got Jesus into trouble. Luke tells us about it early on. Jesus had just returned from the wilderness, and his forty days wrestling with the devil. It is the beginning of his public ministry. He had returned to Galilee with rave reviews. Shortly thereafter Jesus came to his hometown, his home synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth to preach. With opening words from Isaiah:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. (Luke 4:18)*

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He rolled up the scroll, handed it to the attendant, sat down as was the custom in preaching, and began by saying,

*‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’ All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth.”*

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But it didn't last. We can only guess why, but Jesus says that though they may want him to do the marvelous things heard about, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown, and goes on to remind them of the Zarapheth story. When the heaven was shut up three years and six months with a severe famine over all the land, Elijah was sent to none except an outsider, a Gentile, the widow at Zarephath. I suppose that Jesus was making a point that the generosity of God and his self-proclaimed mission to bring good news could only be realized when it was extended to the most who were poor, the captives, the blind and the oppressed, in other words the outsiders. It may have been the right thing to think and to do, but they got so angry that they drove him out of town and tried to throw him off a cliff.

Consider the First Kings story itself. It too speaks of a kind of year of the Lord's favor too. This time it is exercised by the prophet Elijah. It was a dry time in Israel. Ahab ruled and, having married Jezebel, Israel was led to worship Baal. As is often done in the histories told of monarchs then, we get a hint in the saying that "Ahab son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord more than all who were before him." (1 Kings 16 30). The worship of the Lord had dried up, and Elijah was sent to first be cared for by ravens in a wadi and, after that had dried up, to be cared for by the widow of Zaraphath.

For all the right reasons things still seem to go from bad to worse. Poverty seems to abound. Elijah is certainly not very polite in his speech. The widow is at the end of her days. And even after the jar of meal is not emptied and the jug of oil not fail, her son succumbs to illness and dies.

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If First Kings has anything to teach us about thinking and doing right, it is a harsh story. Perhaps the end of it and the acknowledgement of being a man of God with the word of the Lord in his mouth being true is the point, but what a difficult way to acknowledge that. Still, thinking right and doing right are never easy.

And here we might put ourselves into the shoes of others – Jesus’ hometown listeners, Elijah, the widow of Zarephath, or even those who were present for the Gospel story of what happened in a town called Nain. As much as we are people of patience and wisdom, as much as we are people of reason and care, there is in us as those others a desire for the right thing and the doing of it, be it for Joan, for Bea or Tom or John, for ourselves as we await the coming of a rector, or for this world of ours that seems to groan for release from wrong doing.

What shall we be about in the meantime? What shall we hold onto during the waiting times?

I wish that I had magic words. I wish that the answers were as pat and simple as “What would Jesus do?” but our lives are never lived on the broad planes of simplicity.

But I do find some help in Paul. As I’ve mentioned before, he is a fascinating character and I have found wonderful insight into him and myself through the writings of many but especially John Dominic Crossan and, in his book, “In Search of Paul,” done with Jonathan Reed. Today’s Epistle in fact takes us to a central issue in Paul’s life about thinking right and doing right.

Let me share with you from Crossan and Reed:

*Paul’s letter to the Galatians is at once apologetic and polemical with a tone both bitterly reproaching and emotionally pleading, a text as cold as the Taurus heights*

*in winter and as warm as the Anatolian plateau in summer. As far as we can understand the situation from Paul's response to it, opponents had told his Galatian converts that his gospel was all wrong, that their males must still be circumcised, that Paul was nothing but a subordinate missionary (not even an apostle), and that moreover, he was living and teaching in disagreement with his superiors at Jerusalem and Antioch. [This] explains Paul's opening sentence [of the Letter to the Galatians] . . . a counterattack . . . 'Paul an apostle – sent neither by human commission not from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead' (1.1) [and] . . . Paul's vocation story [which we heard this morning] . . . a diving call at Damascus and not a human job at Jerusalem.*

The dispute which arose between Paul and the others may have seemed, on the surface, over keeping a Kosher table or not and circumcision or not, but below that lay something far more substantial. For Paul it was about much, much more. It was about whether or not we and the world in which we live is restored, transformed and transfigured, are things different because of Jesus the Christ.

Are we, because of Jesus, restored, transformed, and transfigured people because of Jesus 'already' or 'not yet.' For Paul I believe it was both thinking and doing the right as 'already.' It is Paul from whom we hear words about

- Now is the time
- Though we see in a mirror dimly
- Nothing shall separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Whenever we struggle with ourselves and God (we are always theologs, doing theology) struggling with thinking right and doing right, we will struggle with the 'already' and the 'not yet.' The world does still groan inwardly for restoration, transformation, and transfiguration to God's dream for it and for us, but for Paul and for us there must be that witness to the presence of Christ working in and through us.

You and I will never live on the broad, smooth plain of thinking and doing right. You and I will ever struggle with what to do. But, perhaps, Paul can give us

a bit of help. His is an invitation to think first of how we shall 'be' before we think about how we shall think and do. First comes being, then comes thinking and doing.

Consider how we begin each of our Eucharists with that simple but profound Collect for Purity to the One:

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- To whom all hearts are open
- To whom all desires are known, and
- From whom no secrets are hid.

Laying ourselves before the Holy One, laying our whole selves before the One and inviting the Holy One into our selves, our hearts, our thinking and our doing, is a beginning toward thinking and doing the right.

For Joan and her path about to take a new direction, for Bea, Tom, John, or all those whom we love, for this world and the justice and peace we ache for a beginning to our thoughts and doing begins with embracing the depths of our hearts, our desires, and our secrets, drawing God into them, and inviting God to shape our thinking and our doing.