

I am the Resurrection and the Life. Sermon.
Fr. Hugh. St. George. Pentecost 2C. Proper 5.
Texts: 1 Kings 17:17-24, Luke 7:11-17

Here we are in June. June is of course the biggest wedding month of the year.

One family in Australia were busy preparing for the wedding. The mother of the bride called the baker on the phone to discuss details of the wedding cake. She said:

“I want a verse from the Bible written on the cake. I had it all written down, but now I can’t find the piece of paper. It’s John 4:17.”

The lady in the cake shop said,

“That’s OK Ma’m. I have a Bible here. I can look it up and write it in. John 4:17. Right?”

“Right.” She said. “Thank you.”

Actually, she had meant to say, ‘*First John 4:17*’ - which says, “God is love. Whoever lives in God lives in love.” Very appropriate sentiment.

The next Saturday just before the wedding the cake arrived. On it were inscribed in italicized frosting, the words from John 4:17, which says:

“You have had five husbands and this man you are with now is not your husband.” Oops.

Our Bible readings today speak of the resurrection power of God.

In the first reading we have this remarkable story of the great prophet Elijah raising a boy, the son of a poor widow, from the dead.

Many of the stories in the Old Testament foreshadow the events of Jesus life. They are previews of coming attractions. Nine hundred years later this very same situation was recreated and this time it was Jesus who raised the widow's son from the funeral procession.

If God had never shown us His resurrection power we would never have come to believe in the resurrected life with the assurance that we can have and that I hope you do have.

But God did show his resurrection power.
He showed it with Elijah and the widow's son.
He showed it with Jesus and the widow's son.
He showed it with a little girl who had just died.
"She is not dead but sleeping.

Little girl I say to you arise.”

He showed it with Lazarus, already dead four days and in his tomb. “Lazarus. Come forth.”

But amazing and miraculous as those events were, they were not the fullness of resurrection that He promises to those who are willing to take Him at His Word and believe Him.

The young boys, the little girl and Lazarus still all had to go through death again.

Finally Jesus showed God’s resurrection power in all its fullness and perfection. He rose from the dead and appeared to his disciples on eleven separate occasions over a forty day period,

before ascending into heaven right in front of their eyes.

Jesus' resurrection was of a whole different dimension, because He rose to begin the perfect eternal life to never have to face death again.

He rose to offer the very same thing to each of us, if we will only believe Him for it.

God stands ready to give us the resurrected life, where there will be no more suffering, no more sickness, no more dying, no more tears.

With each healing that Jesus did, with each extraordinary resurrection miracle that He performed, Jesus did it out of compassion.

Compassion means literally to suffer with – to enter into someone else’s suffering and be alongside them. To be moved to want to provide true comfort. He did it as a supreme expression of love and caring.

Still today Jesus enters into people’s sufferings and comes alongside them.

He is with people, often most especially at that point of crossing over from life to death and onward into everlasting life.

20 years ago in April 1990, a man named Rusty Woome died. To be exact he was put to death by the State of South Carolina after an extensive stay in prison. While behind bars he had become a Christian. He kept a journal of his last days.

On Good Friday Rusty lay in his cell and he thought about Jesus. He thought how Jesus had been executed and how He had gone through it all. Like him, He had experienced arrest, trial, sentencing and death. The huge difference being that Jesus was innocent.

Rusty thought about how Jesus has already gone through His death and he said to himself,

“I know He will be there with me when I go to mine.”

A few days later he worked on preparing his final statement with his friend Bob who visited him regularly.

He began his statement by asking forgiveness from the families of his victims. He said, “I understand if they don’t want to forgive me, but my last prayer before I die will be for them.”

He went on ... “I want to tell the Governor that I love him and I am sorry that I put such a load on him by asking him to spare my life. No man should have to bear that kind of load.

“I want to thank the prison officials for their kindness to me and my family. You have made it easier.”

He concluded his statement with

“I want to tell everybody that I am fine.

“I have never known such peace in all my life like I have known in my final days on earth.

“I know some people say I got jailhouse religion, and they are right. I turned to Jesus in prison when I had nowhere else to turn.

Words cannot express what He did for me but He knows and that is all that counts.”

As he said goodbye to his family he asked them to fight less and to hug more. Then he told them to bow their heads in prayer. He prayed:

“Precious Lord, I’m not crying because I feel bad, but because I’m happy that I’m going to be with you. You have done everything for me, far beyond what I deserve.

I ask you to take the hurt and sadness from my family's hearts. And I praise you with all my heart. Amen”

After he was executed in the electric chair the prison Warden had to bring in a counselor to meet with several of the prison staff who had been so moved by the change in this man and the dignity with which he went to his death.

Rusty's friend Bob remarked how amazed he was that Rusty never broke down in his last days. He said:

“His sense of the imminent reality of seeing his Lord seemed to obliterate everything else.”

He added “If only that reality were as vivid for everyone else the church and the world would be transformed.”

St. George is a unique congregation.

Being as we are, made up overwhelmingly of senior citizens, it is not a great surprise that we have a high number of people facing serious illness and facing death.

In the last four weeks we have had no less than four members of St. George die. This is not the first time since I’ve been here that we have had four funerals in a month. This loss is felt terribly by the family and also by friends and indeed it affects the whole church.

While people move here to enjoy the last years of life, there is no escaping the reality of the approach of death.

The death rate holds at an inexorable 100% of the population and none of us can avoid it.

We can strive to lead healthy lives and keep it at arm's length for as long as possible, but sooner or later it is what we all must face.

Therefore it is prudent and essential to think about it, and to come to terms with it. It is not just a matter of having a will and putting one's affairs in order, though that's important.

It is about communicating with loved ones.

And above all it is about contemplating the promises of God that speak to death and life, and resolving how best with God's help to live every day between now and then.

How we prepare spiritually and emotionally to meet death is life's last great challenge.

The way of Christ transcends death, turning the sadness of decline and destruction into the glory of renewed and everlasting life.

Our funeral service opens with powerful, beautiful and comforting words taken from Scripture and expressed in prayer...

“I am the Resurrection and the life, saith the Lord. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.”

I know that my Redeemer liveth, and at the latter day He shall stand upon the earth; and though this body be destroyed, yet shall I see God; whom I shall see for myself and mine eyes shall behold and not as a stranger.

For none of us liveth unto himself, and no man dieth unto himself. For if we live we live unto the Lord; and if we die we die unto the Lord. Whether we live therefore or die, we are the Lord's.”

A nun by the name of Sister Paulette summarized how many of us may feel inside when she wrote,

“I want to die with the heart of a child beating in my old chest; and God willing I want to be remembered as a tiny seed that has been planted in the dark, with roots in eternity, and who died singing of the resurrection.”

Amen.