

Truly He is Risen

Luke 4:25-27 -NRSV

Jesus said, ²⁵But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up for three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; ²⁶yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. ²⁷There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.'

This week I had a medical test to see if I had a potentially life-threatening condition that would have required major surgery. While the test itself was straight-forward and easy, physically, the results would take 48 hours. I reached out to the Prayer Circle, and to my friends and colleagues for prayers. Lots of prayers! The waiting began.

While we were waiting, I watched the news. And the news was filled with tales of COVID-19, and how bad it was throughout the country; how many folks had become sick, how many had died, how some had committed suicide because they were overwhelmed with disease and loss, how there were food shortages and long lines at food pantries. In some places, healthcare workers were being attacked in the mistaken belief that they brought the virus into communities. In the midst of my personal disaster, our world was in disaster.

And then the results came.

I was fine. All was within normal parameters. There would be no need for surgery – monitoring, of course, but no need for surgery and the disruptive recovery that would require. And there was much rejoicing... But.

But I was left with feelings of guilt > why had God spared me and not the Director of the Emergency Response who killed herself? Why had not God spared all those dying in nursing homes? Why had not God spared any of the over 250,000 people recorded as dying from COVID-19 alone? Why do I still have health and enough?

Jesus' words in Luke came to me, and I pondered them. My questions about my situation were still valid in those situations as well. God loves each and every one of us, but we are living in a broken world, a world broken by disease and greed and inadequate (or poorly distributed) resources. People will suffer and die. People will thrive and continue to live. Does this mean that God is not present in the world or, worse yet, that God is capricious or fickle? No. God still brings healing, but God doesn't cause disaster – any inadequate healthcare systems or supplies or preparation are on us. So where is God?

In the words of Mr. (Fred) Rogers, "When I was a boy and would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.' To this day, especially in times of 'disaster', I remember my mother's words and I am always comforted by realizing that there are still so many helpers – so many caring people in this world." So, we need not fear, for God is near, in the helpers. We do not need to feel guilty that we might be suffering less than other people (or not even really at all). We can still rejoice in good fortune, good outcomes! God is good, all the time! And we can say "Thank you."

Lord, my Rock and Redeemer, thank you that you are my strength and my song; you fill my heart with joy. Help me to be mindful of everything you have done for me. Everything I have is a gift from you. You are the God of peace, the great shepherd of the sheep. May you equip me with everything good that I may do your will. Work in me, that I may be pleasing in your sight. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

~the Rev. Charlotte Wells