

1 Kings 17:17-24

Psalm 30

Galatians 1:11-24

Luke 7:11-17

All is lost. Have you ever had that feeling? Have you ever been completely bowled over by the unexpected tragedy that just befell you? Have you ever had your life blow up right before your eyes and there's not a thing you can do about it? It seems as if all is lost and nothing will ever again be the same. Maybe it was a love affair that you thought would end in marriage, but didn't. Maybe it was the death of a spouse or a best friend. Maybe it was the death of a child or a grandchild. Maybe it was the loss of a job or a home. Maybe it was a divorce. Maybe it was discovering that someone you love is alcoholic or a drug addict. Always....it was something that you didn't see coming. Something that you had not prepared for. And always it feels as if your future had been stolen from you because your future will now never be what you had thought it would be.

What happens to us when this happens to us? In the beginning it's just mental confusion and disorientation.....a torrent of questions with no answers as we try to make sense out of what has just happened. Life as we knew it will never be the same. There are tears. Maybe lots and lots of tears. There's a sense of disbelief. This can't be happening! This can't have happened! There's a desperate sense of wanting to turn back time.....to yesterday, before all of this happened. But there's no turning back time. There's only going forward..... only now the landscape is completely different. Now what was 'normal' in life isn't 'normal' anymore. Now we have to figure out and create a 'new normal.' And our sense of safety and security has been badly shaken.

What happens to us is that our hearts are broken wide open. These are not little dinks that momentarily make us sad. These are cataclysmic events that change our lives forever. And our hearts.....now broken.....will never be the same again. There probably isn't a person sitting here this morning who has not been through this experience at some point during their life.

And where is God in all of this? It's a reasonable question to ask. Where *is* God in all this?

Have you ever spent the afternoon or the evening or perhaps even a morning yelling at God? Where were you, God? How could you let this happen? Why didn't you stop this? Aren't you paying attention? Even if you didn't say it all outloud, those thoughts probably floated through your mind.....maybe repeatedly. There aren't any answers.

And there we are.....with the debris from our lives gathered at our feet and our hearts broken wide open.

And that's when Jesus walks in. There's an opening in our hearts now because they are broken in two. You see, it's not until we are at the bottom of the barrel, not until we are on our last leg, not until we are flat on our backs that we are suddenly completely aware of how dependent we are on God.....how much we need him.....how incapable we are of figuring all of this out on our own. Even in our anger, we turn to God. And God is always there waiting patiently for us.

The scripture lessons this morning are about God's compassion and mercy and God's ability to change things. Our God is a God of transformation. One lesson is an Old Testament story about God restoring a dead son to his widowed mother through Elijah. She lived in Sidon, outside the nation of Israel and outside the family of God's chosen people. The lesson is that God's mercy and compassion extend to all people.....all human beings.....as all human beings are children of God.

The New Testament lesson is about God's transformation of Saul into Paul. God changed him. Paul recounts his credentials.....the fact that he got his preaching authority directly from the resurrected Jesus. A former zealous persecutor of the church became its most effective and flamboyant proclaimer of the faith. God, through Jesus Christ, blew up Saul's world.....so completely that as the new normal began to take shape he even got a new name. God was part of all of it. Saul's heart was shattered when he was blinded and led into Damascus. And when he was helpless and brokenhearted, that's when God entered in. Jesus Christ became the cornerstone of Paul's 'new normal.'

And in our gospel lesson this morning, we encounter Jesus once again breaking rules and social mores and demonstrating God's compassion and mercy to a woman who was otherwise invisible. She is a widow which made her almost a non-person and she is burying her only son which leaves her completely destitute.....not just emotionally, but physically and in real danger of starving to death because without her son, she has no means of support. The parade of death as the dead man's bier leaves the city gates with his mother and the mourners following encounters the parade of life in Jesus and his disciples and the crowd that follows them as they prepare to enter the city gates. Jesus doesn't know this woman. He doesn't ask about her sins or the sins of her son. She doesn't express great faith in him. God knows what's in her heart, just as God knows what's in our hearts. She doesn't ask for Jesus' help, but her heart had to have been broken completely in two. Jesus walks right into broken hearts.....hers and ours.....and he meets our needs when we are too distraught to ask for help. Perhaps she had no idea who he was, but he saw her.....perhaps as no one else really saw her.....and his compassion for her prompted his restoring her son's life and restoring her son to her. He transformed her shattered life and gave her back her future for no other reason than that he was profoundly moved by her plight.

This story in Luke was particularly important to Luke's audience. He was writing in the late first century to a Gentile church. The original manuscript was written in Greek, so it may be that his readers and hearers were people with a Hellenistic background. In the Hellenistic way of thinking, being moved by the plight of another was a sign of weakness. Compassion for others was not valued, so this story about Jesus' compassion turned their world upside down. It was exactly the opposite of what they had always believed. And yet it is the revelation of the character and nature of God.

But isn't it just like Jesus to turn our worlds upside down? Which is what our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry says is actually right side up. The entire gospel of Luke is about reversals. It is about Jesus consistently disrupting the status quo in the world in which he lived and moved. He went to the

marginalized. He comforted the afflicted.....and he afflicted the comfortable. Jesus introduced us to the kingdom of God and showed us what that looked like. It looks very different than the world in which we live. It is not a broken world. It is a world in which everyone is important. It is a world in which every life is important. The gospel of Luke is about God's salvation history with the world beginning in the Torah, the Jewish scriptures and continuing into the New Testament and Jesus' earthly mission to show people what it was that God was trying to teach them. The revelation of God is through his Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus' actions demonstrate his right understanding of God's desire for mercy and social justice and thus his fulfilling of God's wishes for the compassionate care of all people.

We are part of that salvation history. We as Christians.....as the body of Christ.....are instruments of God's salvation of all of humanity. As the body of Christ, we are commissioned and given a mandate to continue the work that Jesus began when he walked the earth. We are Easter people. We carry on the work of the resurrected Jesus.

We need to look around. We need to take stock of the world in which we are living. We need to assess its brokenness. We need to truly see who the marginalized people are. We need to tap into the compassion that God gave us and is expecting us to use. Where do we need to rattle the status quo? Where do we need to facilitate some reversals? Where do we need to turn everything upside down, which is actually right side up? What mission is calling us to action?

The bishops of the Diocese Washington and the Diocese of Virginia put out a call for all the clergy to make a statement about the desire for an end to gun violence. They encouraged all of us to wear orange on Thursday and on this Sunday. Gun violence has become a way of life in this country. We are no longer startled or surprised when we hear about a mass shooting on a college campus or in an elementary school or in a shopping center or a sporting event or the accidental shooting of children playing with guns or the ability of someone with depression to successfully suicide because obtaining a gun is so easy. This kind of carnage has become the status quo. Unfortunately, the discussion about gun violence in our country has become politicized, but it shouldn't have. I don't know anyone on any point of the political spectrum that is OK with the threat to our communal safety by gun violence, but this particular status quo has been normalized as if there were nothing that any of us could do about it. If we are called to be the people of God's salvation and members of the Jesus Movement given a mandate and a commission to turn the status quo upside down, what might that look like?

Every single day in our country 91 mothers learn that their child has died as a result of gun violence. Sons die and mothers grieve. Hearts are broken. This is the broken world we live in, but not the kingdom of God that Jesus modelled for us.

God does not abandon us in our heartbreak. Jesus shows up and he shows his compassion to us and mercy to us. Do we allow him in? Are we ready to be transformed? Will we allow his love to heal us? Mended and restored hearts are far stronger than ones that have never been broken. Are we prepared to become fully human and passionate Christians in service to the risen Lord and prepared to challenge the prevailing status quo?

Through God's compassion and mercy, we certainly can be!

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.