

## ***I Say to You, Rise!***

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Scriptures: 1 Kings 17: 8-24, Luke 7:11-17/ Ordinary 10C

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### **Scriptures: 1 Kings 17: 8-24**

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<sup>8</sup>Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, <sup>9</sup>“Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you.” <sup>10</sup>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.” <sup>11</sup>As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, “Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.” <sup>12</sup>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.” <sup>13</sup>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.” <sup>14</sup>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.” <sup>15</sup>She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. <sup>16</sup>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.

<sup>17</sup>After this the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill; his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. <sup>18</sup>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!” <sup>19</sup>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. <sup>20</sup>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?” <sup>21</sup>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.” <sup>22</sup>The LORD listened to the voice of Elijah; the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. <sup>23</sup>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.” <sup>24</sup>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.”

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

<sup>11</sup>Soon afterwards he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went with him. <sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and said to her, “Do not weep.” <sup>14</sup>Then he came forward and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, “Young man, I say to you, rise!” <sup>15</sup>The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. <sup>16</sup>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!” <sup>17</sup>This word about him spread throughout Judea and all the surrounding country.

### **Proclamation of the Word**

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She was down to her last bit of meal and oil. Elijah demanded she bring him drink and bread for he had been told by the Lord that God had commanded her to do so. How ridiculous that must have seemed to the poor widow! Living on the edge, she is asked to care for this man when she and her son, who was considered an orphan upon the death of his father, are at the end of their financial rope. They are living on the edge.

Many people live on the edge. The Torah, Biblical law requires people of faith to care for those most vulnerable who are without opportunity. After the Israelites came up out of Egypt as slaves and the 10 Commandments were given to Moses, Exodus 10:17-19 states,

***17**“For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe. **18**“He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. **19**“So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.*

Repeatedly God’s law involves a command to care for the most vulnerable in your midst. For God’s people had once been poor and without rights as slaves, and the God of Israel intends for his people to execute compassion and justice.

But why would God command a poor widow to take care of the prophet Elijah when she could barely sustain herself and her child? Perhaps it is because Elijah too is vulnerable. He is an alien, a stranger. Elijah, the prophet, is called by God at a time when the sins of the King Ahab and the people are many. They worship Baal. The King takes another man’s wife and then kills her husband. Elijah prophesies that there will be a drought in the land, God’s judgment upon them. The drought will show them that Yahweh God is sovereign and not the false god Baal. It is the Lord who is in charge of rain and all of Creation.

Elijah has been sent to the wilderness by the Lord and been tested. He arrives at the gates of Sidon, hungry and tired. He is met there by the widow. The passage about Elijah and the widow begins the prophetic work in response to the sins of the people. Elijah the prophet is to call the people back to the true God and God’s intentions.

Scripture reminds us that the Lord cares for wholeness and balance in creation. Certainly the needs of Elijah, the woman and her son are visceral, bodily, economic and spiritual. God cares for the whole person. Both the widow and Elijah realize their mutual need and dependence upon one another. For later when her son falls ill, Elijah covers the boy’s whole body with his own, weeps, and beseeches God to bring him life. The boy is raised to new life. Elijah gives him back to his mother, giving her a chance at life, a means of survival. Elijah shows us that it is his God who gives life and brings order once again to the

chaos in person's lives and the chaos in creation. We trust in a God who restores life and wholeness.

In Luke's Gospel we hear a similar witness to resurrection. Jesus sees a widow's deep distress over the death of her son. He says, "do not weep" to the widow. Then he touches the dead man's coffin and says, "Young man, I say to you, rise" Jesus was moved to compassion for this widow who by virtue of the loss of her only son would be invisible, silenced, and unable to live. Elijah weeps over the young boy, and Jesus feels compassion. The boy is healed and the widow has a chance at life again.

The word *Compassion* has lost its power. We use it regularly. But the word in Greek means that Jesus felt it in his gut...literally Jesus was physically sickened for her. He had a bodily reaction. This is so much more than pity. He felt deeply her pain. Elijah who has been the recipient of the widow's hospitality and care, weeps over her son, and throws his whole body on top of the boy begging God to make their lives whole again.

Compassion is deep, physical, and requires action.

Jesus, God's own son, can raise the dead, bring justice for the oppressed, and announce good news to the poor. Just a few chapters before he claims this vision and mission. Following this passage of the widow's son being raised, Jesus claims the same vision and purpose. If we, the church of Jesus Christ, are Christ's living body here on earth, then we have the same mission.

Perhaps that seems like a daunting task. We see our limitations and desires. We ourselves are overcome with the devastation and death we see. So maybe we can identify more with Elijah. He shows up in need and vulnerable. The woman shows him grace and mercy. His compassion and care for the widow and her son is great. They have a mutual relationship.

When we ourselves have suffered, we are perhaps better able to care for those who are weeping, who have no hope.

Our compassion is felt in the pit of the stomach, and we reach out to touch the wounds of others and our world.

Acts of Compassion are way to announce God's kingdom come near.

By touching the wounded people and places in our world, in effect, we are saying as Jesus said, "I say to you, rise."

Rise up out of despair.

Rise up out of your trauma and devastation

Rise up and know the God who knows and loves you.

God will make you whole.

In the coming weeks we will send out many members to serve God with acts of compassion.

Forty five of our Senior Highs and adult advisors will be commissioned today to go to Canada to work at a Christian camp, seeing needs, and responding.

Some 24 of our Middle School youth and their leaders will be sent out next month to go to the poorest parts of West Virginia to witness to God's compassion by assisting with flood clean-up and home repairs. They will announce Jesus' words, "Rise up!"

And you, no matter what your age, have the opportunity to serve with compassion those who lack the most basic gift of clean drinking water- a resource we take for granted. June 21-25 the Christian Action ministry will lead a trip to Charleston to build water treatment systems and provide clerical support with Water Missions International. Over 20% of the world suffers from disease due to lack of clean drinking water.

In addition, with your help our children will be engaged in learning the stories of Jesus and living out that mission by serving our neighbors here in this community and abroad through our Bible Schools and Mission Camps. And so many of you will continue the ongoing works of compassion in the places where you live, work, and serve. And by doing so you will be saying, "I say to you, rise!"

All these acts of compassion are rooted in our belief that Jesus came to bring new life, healing and restoration to those most desperate for it. And we are the channels of that compassion- His living, breathing body here on earth. The church of Jesus Christ is called to raise the dead, bring sight to the blind, and bring good news to the poor. Real needs are being met. In the Bible, each time God works to bring new life, people praise and glorify God. Through our acts of compassion, we pray that people are drawn closer to God and that we bring God glory.

In doing so we are sharing the grace, freely given, unmerited, unbidden that is offered to us. Jesus knows our needs and our deepest hurts. He offers to us at table today the food that sustains and the cup of life that refreshes so that we might know such healing and peace. But we do not stop there simply enjoying such grace for ourselves. We are all then commissioned and sent to share God's redemptive love with neighbors near and far and with God's good creation.

God loves us in our deepest need and most vulnerable places, but calls us to a bigger vision and mission that brings that peace to others. And the Kingdom of God comes near....God allows, in fact calls us, to partner with him to bring that message into this world.

Stan Ott is a pastor who is assisting our church as we participate in an initiative called Acts 16:5. We are being encouraged to be a church that brings God's transforming power of healing and grace into the world as we grow closer to God and God's intentions for our lives. Stan tells the story of sitting in a hospital waiting room. A man and he begin talking when Stan says "God bless you!" to the stranger. The man responds, "Do you know what that means?" Interested Stan replies, "What does it mean?" The man says, "He will make you rise!" "That's an interesting take. I like it." Stan replied. A few minutes later the stranger got on the elevator to leave. The man says to Stan, "God bless you." To which

Stan replied, "He will make you rise! And the doors closed shut. OOOOOH AAAHH chill bumps ensued with the power of those words exchanged between strangers.

Take that message with you today and share it with others.

L: God bless you!

People: He will make you rise!

Thanks be to God who creates us, redeems us and sustains us both now and forever more!

<sup>1</sup>Perhaps the most clear statement on the record from Barth concerning these matters comes from a *Time Magazine* piece on Barth published on Friday, May 31, 1963.

"[Barth] recalls that 40 years ago he advised young theologians 'to take your Bible and take your newspaper, and read both. But interpret newspapers from your Bible.'"