

“LIFE CHANGING EXPERIENCES DURING ORDINARY TIMES” (6/6/10)

SCRIPTURES: I Kings 17: 8-24 & Luke 7: 11-17

KEY CONCEPTS: Ordinary days often contain extraordinary & life changing events – both for the good, the bad & the unknown times of life.

OPENING COMMENTS – REVIEW:

In preparing for this first Sunday of June – as we continue in the liturgical season of “Ordinary Time” I briefly remind you about last Sunday’s rationale for the 3 lit candles.

As you may recall, throughout history the Church has struggled with what to call the 5 month period of time between Pentecost Sunday and the 1st Sunday of Advent – so from late May until the Sunday after Thanksgiving – there is this long liturgical season that contains no major holy days. Some denominations have tried to name this period Whitsuntide, Kingdom tide or the season after Pentecost. Other churches have given up on trying to “name or identify the season & simply call it “Ordinary Time”.

“Ordinary Time” invites us to consider the rhythms that sustain us between the major “high holy days” of Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter & Pentecost. This period of time (from Pentecost to Advent) can remind us that we spend much of our lives dealing with the day to day, often unpredictable, occurrences. The “goings on” shape & ultimately comprise the bulk of our lives. We are called to create & craft holiness & spiritual maturity out of the chaos & confusion – to fashion extraordinary lives out of ordinary days.

(Summarized from Sacred Journeys: A Woman’s Book of Daily Prayer, Jan Richardson, 249)

OUR THREE CANDLES:

During this liturgical season of “Ordinary Time”, we remember that God dwells & works even in ordinary times & places. We never know when the Divine Presence will show forth as we go about our daily work & lives. We collectively celebrate “the ordinary times” by lighting 3 candles as we continue in our worship this day.

Therefore, for the month of June, we will - each week – relight these 3 candles.

- **The Present (Green) Candle:** Reminds us that in this present moment we are together. That our time & energy are gathering into this place. We know & are becoming known to each other & to ourselves.
- **The Past (Red) Candle:** Reminds us of the time before we knew each other; the distant past or even the recent past. Our pasts can’t be changed; however, it can inform our present & future AND nothing of the past can negate God’s love, grace & purpose for each of us – individually or collectively.
- **The Future (White) Candle:** Reminds us that we can believe in the past & the present because we have touched these times & they have touched us. We believe that God’s purpose for us goes out as positive energy ahead of us. And because of Christ, we can have hope for the future – Come what may.

(Summarized from Sacred Journeys: A Woman’s Book of Daily Prayer, Jan Richardson, 251-252)

WILL YOU PRAY WITH ME?

Bless to us, O God, these times of present & past & future. May these flames of dwelling & of memory & of hope become an endless ring of blessing to you. Amen.

JUNE SERMON THEME:

Holy Journeys: Then, Now & Into the Future is this month’s sermon theme. So, before we

look at today's readings, let me ask you a question. Reflecting back on your past or even in this present time, here's a goal for a possible future goal.

If you could take a journey anywhere in the world, where would you go? Why?

TRANSITION:

As we consider a favorite trip or journey – just for fun – a place we'd like to visit in the future, imagine with me for a moment what it might have been like to have been a part of one of today's stories. Could you imagine being one of the onlookers for either or both of today's readings?

HEBREW READING – I KINGS 17: 8-24:

Today's Hebrew Bible reading recounted the story of Elijah & the Widow at Zarephath (a coastal town on the Mediterranean Sea that was located in what is now Lebanon). Some key points of this narrative include:

- Issue of the authority of Yahweh (Israel) contrasted to the other gods of that region
- Elijah – was most powerful prophet of Israel of this time
- Yahweh's ability to care for Elijah during drought (Ravens fed him 2xs daily; Exodus care of manna, meat, etc.)
- God said "Go, I have commanded a widow to care for you"; yet the widow still seemed a bit reluctant to part with her meal & oil (Communication – God – us – others) ☺
- Don't be afraid – make me a cake first & you'll have enough for you & your son
- Specifics of God's promise to provide for her – you won't run out....
- Son becomes ill & dies. Mother's grief focused on "her sin being remembered". ***HOW MANY TIMES DO WE ASK THIS QUESTION WHEN HARD TIMES COME IN OUR LIVES & IN THE LIVES OF THOSE WE LOVE?***
- Elijah prayed, stretching himself 3 times on the child's body – that's a bit weird, don't you think - & then "God hears the prayer" & revives the son.
- Then & only then does the woman state: "Now I know that you're a man of God & that the word of God in your mouth is true."

APPLICATION:

See most of us would have been in awe of Elijah's words being true regarding the meal & oil never running dry or running out. Not this widow, she might have been a hard core skeptic & only the reviving of her dead son could crack her carefully constructed wall of past mistakes, sins & regrets.

NEW TESTAMENT READING – LUKE 7: 11-17:

Let's fast forward to today's reading from the book of Luke. Jesus, whom was sometimes, confused according scripture as being "Elijah" the great prophet & miracle worker was entering a small town called Nain (which was southwest of the Sea of Galilee roughly 12-14 miles). Some key insights include:

- Grown son had died & was being carried out for burial in cemetery outside city
- Woman was a widow; only had this child; with no real way of making honest living
- Jesus' compassion (v.13) – don't weep; touched the bier/box & called the son forth
- The man sat up & spoke
- Jesus' fame spread as a prophet, as a hope giver & life returner

So, here's my closing thought.

CONCLUSION:

As you may know, we began a new educational class this past Thursday night. Nine of us gathered to discuss a passage from Judges, chapter 11, regarding the unnamed daughter of Jephthah, who was sacrificed as a result of her father's vow.

So, for the next 5 weeks, we're going to look at 5 characters (Job, Esther, Peter, Mary of Magdala & the resurrection of Lazarus - & his sisters) – read specific texts & then when the written texts end, we're doing to create Midrashim (or holy imagining that will attempt to answer the question, "what might have happened next?")

So, I hope you'll consider being a part of this weekly Thursday evening brown bag dinner & Bible study. And if you can't make it...I'll leave you with a thought from today's reading – for your holy imagining. Here it is....

Luke 7: 15 states that "The dead man sat up & began to talk & Jesus gave him back to his mother...."

- So...what might the man have said?
- Who helped in out of the bier/box?
- What was the first thing he said to his mother?
- And what might have been her first words to him?
- And what might they have both said to Jesus?

PERSONAL APPLICATION:

Given the reality of death as a part of life – past, present & future – how might we allow God to touch our hearts & lives during those times of loss (grief, death, etc.) as well as during times of grace, restoration & blessing? Do we allow God to be God in both the good & hard times of our lives? And can we believe that God is a "good God who loves & adores us" – even when (no, especially when) difficult issues arise?