

Pentecost 2 (proper 5) 6-6-10 St. Luke's, EG 8 & 10

WITH GOD NEVER USE A PERIOD; ALWAYS A COMMA....

In the name of the Living God, Father, Son & Holy Spirit. Amen.

It always pays for a preacher to go from time to time to hear somebody else! Last week in York Harbor, Maine, I heard a great sermon by the deacon of the parish (obviously rectors don't seem to preach much on Memorial Day Sundays!)

Among the pithy things the deacon proclaimed about the Holy Mysteries we celebrate Sunday by Sunday is the quotation with which I just began. "Boy, there's a sermon in that," I thought last week, but I had no idea it would come so fast...until I read the lessons for today: all about death not being the last word in our reality.

There are two stories here, one from the Elijah series in the First Book of Kings, where the prophet brings the child of the widow of Zarephath back to life, and one from Luke's gospel where Jesus raises the son of the widow of Nain.

Among the many lessons in both stories, I get the message that **with God never use a period, always a comma.**

In both stories, there's a parallel about widows and how tough life is when they lose their source of support, in both cases their sons, in a culture where they would find themselves at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder.

In both stories, we get the point by the end of the details that ***with God there is always hope, and compassion***, whether it be in the midst of life's most troubling difficulties, or even at the point of, and in the face of, death.

I had such an experience just within the past two weeks when one of our most beloved parishioners, when faced with a deathly prognosis, said through tears, "If it turns out I can't walk again, ***at least I know where I am going.***"

What faith! It moved the rest of us witnessing this holy moment to our own tears, but in the long run it has stayed with me as a confirmation that ***with God, never use a period, always a comma.***

This window, to be dedicated today, is a sign of that same faith. It is in remembrance of a dear man and his beloved first wife, some of whose family is here today. It happens he was also the dearest friend of the very parishioner I mentioned a moment ago who died this past week in a state of peace, surrounded by loving family and friends, some of whom also are here today. Quite miraculously it turns out that this window, originally given by the family of Art and Mary Drew will now be in remembrance also of Bud Koeniger, dear friends in life, now bonded forever in death as well, by this beautiful memorial window in the church they both loved so well, and to which they gave so much of their lives, their energies, their love, their devotion.

The window looks down on the exquisite oriental rug given by Art in loving memory of his second wife, Elsie, also a precious parishioner, Altar guild member, beloved mother, grandmother and friend to so many.

Somehow this confluence of generosity and beauty, love and devotion is a sign to me that *with God, never use a period, only a comma.*

The window itself portrays a story deeply meaningful to our congregation and to ALL Christian congregations where the Spirit of Jesus, the Christ, lives among us in ways that shape us and form us from the time we are little people, playing out in the garden after services, whooping it up in safety around people of their extended families where they can be themselves, appreciated and able to cultivate the values of trust, love and compassion that will carry them *through their lives* until they can say on their death bed, *“at least I know where I am going.”*

The Children’s Window *“For of such is the kingdom of God,”* speaks to people of all ages, the child inside of each one of us here. For we each need to hear the stories from the gospels, preceded by the Old Testament stories that give parallel messages that the God of the prophets, and of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the God who will NEVER let us go, even at the point of death.

Everything in these stories move inexorably toward death, JUST LIKE LIFE. All that lives dies, after all. Death, when you think about it controls every situation...until Jesus shows up. And just by showing up, the inexorable march toward death is reversed.

A couple of the lines from the hymns today help to make my point: In the face of death, give praise to the Lord; “ponder anew what the almighty can do who with his love doth befriend thee” (Hymn 390).

And then: “Help us to know your kingship that we, in every hour, in all that may confront us, will trust your hidden power” (Hymn 255).

Your hidden power, O Lord, that we come to know in Jesus, (*think of that*) expressed in the stories and pictures of his life embedded on our psyches in stained glass and in Gospel parables, even in sermons from time to time, but then LIVED OUT IN OUR OWN LIVES when we are open to it.

“I say to you, ARISE,” says Jesus to the son of the widow of Nain. The same question is put to us, time and time again, as we pray and worship, meditate and ponder anew indeed JUST what the Almighty can do, in the midst of our choices and challenges.

In the face of death and deathly circumstances and loss, yes, of course; but also *even in just the daily difficulties and challenges* of our lives this invitation is given:

I say to you, ***arise to those challenges***, even of your own losses, fears and disappointments, your lack of self-esteem or shame:

- ***Arise to the mercy and forgiveness of God.***
- ***Arise into a life gripped and shaped*** by the ***mystery of God in your heart*** as you love and live as Jesus did.
- ***Arise*** and become part of a life that will not cease ***when your heart stops beating***, but will continue on into God’s eternity,

remembering:

with God, never use a period, only a comma,

even now, as we stand to say we believe...