

The Rev. Dr. Hilary B. Smith

Holy Comforter

Richmond, VA

June 5, 2016; the 3rd Sunday after Pentecost

Readings: 1 Kings 17:8-24; Psalm 146; Galatians 1:11-24; Luke 7:11-17.

Knowing God Everyday

As we often talk about in the Episcopal Church, there is no separation between what is spiritual and what is daily material life with all its concerns, challenges, and pleasures. There is not our spiritual life and the rest of life...there is just life...life with God, in whom we live and move and have our being.

But because what is material is always right in front in us, it helps to connect with God in this life by having reminders of God with us.

We are reminded when we pray; we are reminded when we read the Bible; we are reminded when we come to church; we are reminded when we go on a retreat of some kind.

Retreats help us to move away from our everyday concerns to have a bit more space and focus for God, the things of God, the spiritual longing that lives in us all the time. I will say more about retreats in a few moments, and the retreat I just had, but first, let us consider the gift and challenge of one of our Bible readings for today: the story of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath. Widows in Biblical times were of course in a terrible situation -- without a husband to provide for them, they could easily starve and the widow of Zarephath made clear.

This woman had small amount of meal and oil, enough for a meager meal for herself and her son, after which they would die for lack food.

The Hebrew scriptures are rich in detail of daily life...and also in the movement of God, the action of God, in their lives. There is a

miracle---Elijah insists that the widow feed him first and that God will not let them run out of food...and it so.

Some in considering this story, speak about Elijah as “the wild divine word” sent from God...and those who would host that wild word know the compassion of God, are saved from disaster.¹ The widow welcomed the wild one of God, perhaps not with enthusiasm at first, but she did welcome Elijah, who was on the run from Ahab and the drought...you remember from last Sunday’s reading. Being a prophetic can be dangerous...Elijah had to get out of there after challenging those who worshiped other gods.

After this miracle of feeding and plenty being supplied by God, God gives even more. The widow’s son is dead. But Elijah covers him with his body and prays, pleads to God, “let this child’s life come into him again.” And the boy comes back to life.

The prayers that we will use today are based on this prayer of Elijah’s...we will pray to God, “let your life fill this child again,” the one who needs to know and experience the life that God gives. We will have time in silence during the prayers to name in our hearts those who are “bowed down by the weight of what cannot be controlled; those who are hopeless, helpless, lost in fear, imprisoned, abandoned, blinded by desires, and preparing to die.”²

There are two lessons for us in this story and in these prayers. We are both the ones who need this life renewed in us by God; and we are also the ones who are called, like Elijah, to stand with the excluded,

¹ David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds., *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol. 3*, Carolyn J. Sharp, “Theological Perspective,” Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010, Epub., Loc. 3632 of 14296.

² Kimberly Bracken Long, editor, *Feasting on the Word, Worship Companion: Liturgies for Year C, Vol. 2, Trinity Sunday Through the Reign of Christ*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013, Loc. 875-903 of 6773.

ignored, and the poor of our society. We need to be reminded that the life-force given to us by God, the divine spark, given in our creation, is still with us and is renewed by God when we open ourselves to God's healing power.

As one commentator notes, "We die, but God covers us with life, then sends us forth, surprised to be Elijah."³ We can be that prophetic presence, which Carolyn Sharp, describes as being more striking than bringing the widow's son brought back to life:

"The Israelite wild man dwells with the Sidonian widow in abject poverty, not just briefly but for years. His choice to be present with her shows us how we may embody the prophetic word in our own lives: in intimate solidarity with those at risk."⁴

Before we can be a prophet to others, we need to experience God's life with us and in us and for us. Our Bible stories have so much to teach us and so much inspiration for us, but they they can seem far from our experience. We love hearing of God's power, in the life of Elijah and Jesus. Widows sons brought back to life. But how do we know God in this way?

Do we need to see someone brought back from the dead? This can be the challenge of our Biblical accounts. How much can be metaphor and still matter for us? I hold that our faith is based on both -- actual miracles that we see in history, especially in the Biblical accounts, and miraculous things that we have seen happen in our lives and in the lives of others.

Where there was death; now there is life...or will be life. And metaphors are powerful too, inviting us to imagine and enter into a story, imagine how it can be true for us now in our lives, even if the exact things do not happen.

³ David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds., *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol., 3*, Glauca Vasconcelos Wilkey "Pastoral Perspective," Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010, Epub., Loc. 3699 of 14296.

⁴ *Ibid.* Loc. 3643 "Theological Perspective," Carolyn J. Sharp.

The Spirit is there in our imagining, making it real for us. How can we be Elijah for others -- the wild one, who trusts God so much that he gives himself, his body, to the one in need so that the person is helped and God's glory shines forth for all to see?

We need times of retreat---to focus, and pray, and regroup with God. It is great to go away, and if you would like to do that, I have suggestions that are affordable and within reach. Now is the time to register for our October parish retreat, and financial aid is available. But this might not be a season of life when you can go away, which is why coming here on Sunday mornings is so important. Sunday morning can be that retreat, for even a couple of hours. That's how I view our time together---a holy time set apart to be with God in a special way. Imagine how delighted God is to be with you in this way!

Here, together, in community, we get to focus on prayer, the Bible, Christ among us in our fellowship of love, prayer, support for each other, Christ among us in the sacrament of bread and wine. Today, Christ also among us as we share food for our food pantry friends, bringing the food to the Altar. It is here that we are reminded that God is with us, yes here, everywhere, every day.

At the start of the retreat I took a couple of weeks ago, we began with a service the first night we were there.

During the service we sang a song entitled, "Everyday God."

Our God is an Everyday God.

The song touched me deeply.

There are copies of the song by Bernadette Farrell for you to take on your way out...perhaps the words will speak to you and enliven your prayer.

Here are some of the words; and it was suggested to us as we were at the retreat center in the days before Trinity Sunday, that the final line, *Come,*

be with us, could also be God the Holy Trinity invited us, as well as we asking God to be with us.

Earth's creator, *Everyday God*,
Loving Maker, *O Jesus*,
You who shaped us, *O Spirit*,
Recreate us, *Come, be with us*.

In your presence, *Everyday God*,
We are gathered, *O Jesus*,
You have called us, *O Spirit*,
To restore us, *Come, be with us*.

In our dreaming, *Everyday God*,
In our daring, *O Jesus*,
In our searching, *O Spirit*,
In our sharing, *Come, be with us*.⁵

Amen.

⁵ Words for all the verses - <http://predmore.blogspot.com/2010/06/song-lyrics-to-everyday-god-by.html>
video, music -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cgPVgk0AMd8>