

The dead man sat up and began to speak.

This in itself was a tremendous miracle. The son was dead, but now he's alive. Jesus touched the dead man and now he's not dead anymore. Praise God! Jesus, by his coincidental proximity to the funeral cortège, gave a man new life and a widow her son. The crowds were filled with fear, and I would imagine, a good helping of awe and wonder.

But there is a whole lot more going on here than a widow's son coming back to life. See, we read this through 21<sup>st</sup> century, north American, Christian eyes. It is a healing story. It shows us the power of God through his son, Jesus. And, we're absolutely right.

The message that through God all things are possible, even the raising of a man from the grave is Good News, indeed. I'm sure that's what the audience to this miracle thought as well.

I think though, that they would also have seen a second message. A second helping of Good News if you will. And I think it's why Jesus chose this man, this widow's son and not all the other widows' sons that died. Jesus was saying something to the people who saw it then and those who would hear it later.

I'm sure that as we heard the Gospel read we were reminded of the reading from 1<sup>st</sup> Kings. Elijah's story about the son of the widow is very similar to Jesus and this widow's son. But, there are subtle differences. The author of 1<sup>st</sup> Kings never says the boy was actually dead. That may have been what he was implying, but we're a bit unsure. The Hebrew speaks of being without soul or spirit. Also, Elijah asked God to give the spirit or soul back to the boy.

In the Gospel, there is no question that the son is dead. They're on the way to the gravesite. And Jesus didn't ask God to raise the man, Jesus commanded him to rise. The power to raise people from the dead was in the person of Jesus Christ.

The crowds would have recognized something almost immediately. Jewish tradition said that Elijah would return before the great day of the Lord. Luke reports that the crowds said, God has looked favorably on his people.” The great day of fulfillment is called in Isaiah, the day of the Lord's favor.

See, Jesus was saying that all that the prophets had proclaimed was a present reality in Jesus. The Kingdom of God was here. Not some far off dream, but a reality now.

The dead man sat up and began to speak. Well, he spoke volumes without opening his mouth. When that man sat up on his funeral bier, he proclaimed to all the world that the kingdom of God was at hand and that it was brought into being by Jesus of Nazareth..

Jesus raised that man so that his widowed mother wouldn't lose her only source of support and the man would continue to live out his life. Great acts by themselves. But, Jesus raised that man from the dead for you and for me and for all the ages.

Jesus healed the sick, raised the dead, made the lame walk and the blind see. Jesus changed the world in these singular acts.

But what does that really mean to you and to me? How is our life affected by Jesus proclaiming the coming of God's reign on earth? We still have wars. We still die. People still kill each other. Certainly, God is not acknowledged as Lord by anywhere near everyone.

How can we say, how can we have the nerve to claim that God reigns when war is waged throughout the world. How can we say the God of Love is in charge when children are kidnapped and turned into soldiers or sex slaves.

2,000 years ago, Jesus claimed that by his life, death, resurrection and ascension, the exile of the Jews was over and the Kingdom of God was a present reality. Tell that to a parent of a murdered child.

You know, we can debate what it means to say the Jesus is both human and divine all day and never get it figured out. But whatever he was, he was not naïve. When Jesus did those things that proclaimed the reign of God, he knew the world wouldn't change over night. He wouldn't have predicted his death if he knew that that kingdom where there is no death would be in place.

Just because God's in charge doesn't mean we listen to him.

I've gotten on a kick of reading historical novels about England. There's a series written by a man named Rutherford that tracks parts of the country's history from prehistoric days to the more modern past. One of the things that seems common to all the ages is that regardless of who was in charge, most people lived on just as they had before.

This may be heresy, but on a personal, micro scale, my life hasn't changed too much regardless of whether we had a democrat or republican president. I still ate well. I still got paid. I could still walk down the street without having to have a passport. Now on a more macro scale, things might be different, but if I only look at my own little life, who's in charge doesn't seem to matter much.

That's true with the kingdom of God. God is in charge, we just don't listen to him. Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life, but not everybody cares. God is Love, but not all believers in God have accepted that as their own.

We're a bunch of frail, broken people who have been left to their own devices and desires. We are influenced by so many factors that they can't all be positive or Christ guided. And we can't discount the power of evil. Whether it's a personal being like the devil, or a malignant life force, evil is real. Someone once said that evil is a force looking for personality. I think they meant that evil works only when it is done by a person.

An earthquake is not evil. Someone blowing up a school is. The virus that causes AIDS is not evil. Purposefully infecting someone with that virus is.

There's evil in the world because we let it direct our actions. There are people that don't know the love of God in Christ, because we have not shown it to them, or worse yet, we who claim to be shaped by that love too often live in ways that are hurtful and mean.

There are wars because we teach our children to hate.

If Jesus were to come among us today and say that the kingdom of God was at hand, we'd find it hard to accept. (There's a guy out there right now saying that exact thing and we all think he's either a con man or nuts. I think he's lying, but what if we're wrong).

If we are looking for an instantaneous event that ushers in that land where there is no death, we're going to be waiting a long time. But we can see glimpses. Sometimes we get it right and a little more of that kingdom light peeks through the cloud. Debby Tripp told a story of a man kneeling down among a group of survivors of the Rwandan genocide and asking their

forgiveness for being one of the murderers. A glimpse of the kingdom. Some survivors walked out, but some stayed and the glimpse got brighter.

You know, if someone claimed to have been dead and then alive again, we wouldn't believe it. Maybe we can only accept the wonder of the kingdom in little bites. Little glimpses. The family broken by betrayal and violence finding peace and hope. A teenager who walks out of a party because someone has brought out a crack pipe. An alcoholic standing up for the first time and saying, "my name is Joe and I've been sober for 8 hours."

Jesus did everything necessary to show that the kingdom of God is here. It's not his fault we don't see it. That fault is ours, collectively and individually. We need to look for those breaks in the clouds. And, we need to make those breaks ourselves by living as though the kingdom is a present reality. To live in such a way that people who look upon us see the love of Christ. Live in such a way that those who still live in darkness see a way to the light. To live in such a way that people will say, God has looked with favor on his people.