

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Her son was so sick that there was no breath left in him. It is an accurate description of physical death. But that grieving widow of Zarephath was not without hope. She had seen the Prophet Elijah do miracles before. During a severe drought, it was the same widow that ran out of food for herself and her son. As she gathered sticks to make her last meal, and then starved to death, the Prophet intervened. At his word flour and oil were miraculously multiplied, and sustained them throughout a horrible drought. At the Prophet's speaking, their lives were spared.

But now that son who was spared starvation had no breath left in him. His severe illness overcame him. His life was gone. The woman's first words to the Prophet were "...have you come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and kill my son?" She confesses that her sin is great. But she is mistaken – no one is punished for the sins of another. Sin may bring suffering and even death to others, but not at the hand of God.

And that the Prophet proves. As God promised Moses at Marah, He is the God Who Heals. It was not Elijah that multiplied the flour and oil. It was God. He is the God of Life. He is the God Who Provides. He is the God Who Heals. So the lifeless boy was wrested from his grieving mother's arms, and the Prophet's prayer was answered. The boy's life was returned to him.

The mother must have been overwhelmed with joy and relief. But consider her words: "Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord is in your mouth." As great as the miracle was, as personally impactful as the raising of her son from death might have been, the result was that the woman believed that Elijah spoke the Word of God. And that Word brings eternal healing: healing of soul.

The nobleman's daughter, like the widow's son, had no breath left in her. She died. And the woman with the flow of blood for twelve years was horribly afflicted. Both the woman and the nobleman turned to Jesus. The nobleman spoke words of trust. He hoped in Christ: "...come and lay your hand on her and she will live." He trusted that the Lord's touch would bring life.

So to the suffering woman. She said "If only I may touch His garment, I shall be made well." They trusted in Christ. They trusted that He brought with Him the New Creation, the making of all things new promised of old. He spoke and it was. The woman was healed. The nobleman's daughter returned to life. It was unto them as they believed.

But as with the widow of Zarephath's son, so also was it with the nobleman's daughter and the afflicted woman. The widow proclaimed that Elijah spoke the Word of God. The afflicted woman was healed, as the Lord taught her, by her faith. And at the raising of the nobleman's daughter, the report went out into all the land.

Faith trusts that God is the God Who Heals. So faith, saving faith, trusts that Christ will heal, for He is God. It is the voice of faith that begs Christ of a dead daughter "Come and lay your hand on her, and she will live." It is faith that reaches out to touch even the hem of Christ's garment, trusting that He will heal. It is faith that hearkens to the Prophetic and Apostolic Word of God, the Word that brings life even out of death.

And yet all around us there is sickness and death. Just over a week ago a beloved Deacon who served this parish was met with physical death after a long illness. The following Tuesday eight people were murdered in Manhattan by a man shouting praises to the Muslim god, a god that teaches his followers to kill. And each of us has been touched by death, the loss of a loved one. Each of us has seen those close to us suffer. Many of you have known difficulty and affliction and tribulation.

Even those with faith in Christ become sick, suffer, and die. We have our flesh, and that flesh, that frail, fickle, weak flesh must go the way of all flesh. It is the just sentence pronounced upon all the sons of Adam. Sickness isn't a sign of God's disfavor over a particular sin, although some sinful behaviors expose men to disease and infirmity. But sickness and death are a manifestation of the fallenness of all men. It is a consequence of sin.

At times the Lord does work miraculous healings, as it pleases Him, as it is in accord with His Holy will. But it seems that most of the time no miracle comes. No Prophet intercedes. No holy garment is available to touch. No miraculous Word is spoken that works life. And we find ourselves with the widow gathering sticks, grieving for those around us, plagued by our own mortality.

But it was not so in Eden. Man was not created for sickness or death. And in Eden there was plenty, there were no famines. Nor are there famines or sickness in heaven. In heaven there is no death. There the saints and angels know only everlasting life. They always hear the life-giving, life-sustaining voice of God. There the train of His raiment, the garment of holiness and healing and life, fills that heavenly temple. As in Eden, in heaven there is no suffering, only joy.

And the Church Victorious is there, in heaven, protected, safe, in perpetual bliss, because the God who sent Elijah, the God who spoke the nobleman's daughter to life, the God that healed the afflicted woman with only a touch, the same God Himself fasted to the point of starvation. The hem of the His garment was taken from him, as the soldiers cast lots for it. He was crucified until there was no breath left in Him. His mother beheld His lifeless Body. But they took Him from her not to return Him alive, but to lay Him in a grave and seal it.

No Prophet interceded, no Word of healing or life was spoken. He took on your flesh, and suffered and died. And in so doing, He paid the price, the eternal price, of your sin. He took your sin upon Himself. He died your death. And when He defeated death, when He rose from the grave, when He took up His life again, He brought with Him eternal healing, and everlasting life for you. In Christ, there is no death left for you. In Christ you live – now – and for eternity.

That eternal life is yours now, by faith in the God who sent the Prophets. That eternal healing is yours now in the Christ that raised the ruler's daughter, the Christ that healed the afflicted woman. In faith, you confess with Job, even in the depths of suffering, as he exclaimed "For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth; And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God, Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!"

The Lord took on Flesh to redeem you body and soul. He became Man to save all men, to save you, from death. That is true healing. He brings a life that cannot be taken away. You have that life now by promise, the promise of the God Who Heals. You have it now by faith that you see through the tribulations of this world, that you see through sickness, that you see through even death, trusting in the life that Christ gives, trusting in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

And as you live out your earthly life, as trial and tribulation surround you, the Lord bids you not touch the hem of his garment, but eat His Body and drink His Blood, as the Apostle writes “He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the Kingdom of the Son of His Love, in whom we have redemption through His Blood, the forgiveness of sins.” In the Holy Eucharist there is healing for you, healing of soul.

By faith you know that God heals. And by the same faith you know, you believe, that those who sleep in Christ are not dead. They live, because Christ lives. And so will you live, Redeemed of Christ. And that life will be manifest to all on the Day our Risen and Ascended Lord returns to take His Church home. Until that day, you have the Gospel Promise. You have the Word of God, the Prophetic and Apostolic Word, the Saving Gospel. So be of good cheer, your faith has made you well.

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