

Pentecost 2 - 6 June 2010 - Proper 5 C  
1 Kings 17:8-16 (17-24); Galatians 1:11-24; Luke 7:11-17  
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Good morning. My name is Susan Burnham. I am introducing myself to some of you and reintroducing myself to others of you. I have finished up my second year of Seminary here in Austin and am working here at the Episcopal Church of the Resurrection as part of the curriculum for the Masters of Divinity program. I am quite happy to be back with this community and look forward to worshipping and growing with you all in our lives with Christ.

We take a plethora of classes during seminary; one of my favorites is history. It was part of my undergraduate double major of Christianity and History at Houston Baptist University, so clearly it is one of my favorite avenues of study. I read a story in a book called, *A History of the Church in England*, by J. R. H. Moorman, that goes as follows...

There was a Christian priest in Britain in the early 300's who was running from Diocletian's persecution. He went to a man named Alban's house and he hid the priest. They struck up a conversation and the priest shared the Gospel with him. Alban converted to Christianity. The men came to the house to kill the priest, Alban took his clothes and went out disguised as the priest and was martyred shortly after professing his faith in Christ. Some of the scholars say that Alban did this because the priest was better educated in Christianity and therefore better equipped to spread the Gospel than Alban. Alban died as a Christian hero. And they glorified God because of him.

There is a certain sequence of evangelism in today's passages. I noticed it when I read the reading from Saint Paul. Paul made what seemed to be a shocking statement to me at first. That is until I reread it and thought about the theology behind it. "And they glorified God because of me." At first I thought, what hubris, but upon further reflection of the reading it started to make sense in the context of the passage.

He was not being boastful, he was stating that because of Christ's revelation to him and Christ working through him, others were able to glorify God.

If we look at the Old Testament reading we encounter a woman that has come to terms with her financial crisis and is going to eat her last meal with her household and then face death with strength. I do not believe that this is the average person's response when they are facing death for whatever reason. This tells me that she is a remarkable woman. She is caring for her family as best she can until the end. So, God tells Elijah to go to Zarepath and find the widow that will feed him. He is obedient and finds the woman. He tells her what to do and not to worry, that God spoke with him about her and the Lord is going to take care of her. Once again the woman does the odd thing and believes the stranger and is obedient. The food did not run out and the household lived. (The bracketed section) from this reading speaks of an interesting scene. Her son gets sick and she blames the prophet, even though he saved them. So Elijah goes up and cries to the Lord and the Lord restores her son. It is at this point that she believes that the words of Elijah are the words of the Lord. I think it is safe to say that they glorified God because of him.

In the Gospel reading we see Jesus save a widow's son. The widow and those who were with her were weeping and walking out of the town with her only son's body. Jesus sees this and he has compassion. He walks over to her and he says to her, "Do not weep." Of course she is weeping her husband is dead and now her only son is dead as well. There are no men left in the house and she was going to be left to fend for herself. Her life as she knew it was over. Jesus did not say this to her because she should not have been weeping, but because He knew what He was going to do. He said to the son, "Rise!" And he

rose from the dead, well enough to speak. "And they glorified God because of Jesus."

So in the Old Testament passage it is through a prophet speaking with God that a woman is shown the Lord. In Saint Paul's Epistle we see that Paul is saved by Christ and then He saves the Gentiles with Christ speaking through him. In the Gospel passage we see that people are saved by Jesus speaking to them. Then those people went and spread the Word about Jesus throughout Judea and all the surrounding countryside.

It looks a lot like the concept of, "pay it forward." Someone helps you change your tire and they say just pay it forward, it means the next time you see someone else in need, you stop and help them. They do the same thing, and so on and so forth. What this leads to is individuals helping their fellow humans. The motivation behind it; someone asked them to pay it forward. This is what God asks us to do when He says we are to spread His Word throughout the World. This is one way we glorify God. We talk about God's love for each individual because faith, though communal, is also very individual. Church is not a country club despite what some outsiders may believe. There is a reason we come to this place or some place similar It is to be fed and to worship God and to glorify Him. I say to you friend in Christ, pay it forward. Do not be afraid like the priest who hid from his persecutors, but be like Saint Alban and speak to those who do not yet know the love of God through Jesus Christ. Then if they do reject you find strength that you have done the will of God.

I am not telling you to go and set up a box on the corner and shout at people. What I am saying, is that it begins with one person as in all the readings we heard today. Much of the spreading of the Gospel starts with a good relationship with an individual and then as comfort grows, questions will arise. I had a teacher who I studied drums under for five years, he was a self proclaimed Buddhist and I was a young evangelical Christian. We spoke often of religion, but I

never did sway him. I lost touch with him for about a year. When we reconnected, I found out that he had been playing a Church gig every Sunday and he said, between me, that preacher and the Holy Spirit, he never stood a chance. He died about a year after confessing faith in Christ. In my experience, people want to know what motivates me to follow Christ and this is much of what we talked about. Other people that are Christians that I have spoken with have had similar experiences. Not everyone converts immediately, but it is an important seed that has been planted. That is sometimes all we are called to do for an individual, is to plant that seed of the living Word of God and let it grow. This will allow us, like Saint Paul, to say, "And they glorified God because of me."

Our motivation is not for this purpose, but as Christians, our lives are. Our lives are to be lived with Christ in mind, who instructed us to pay it forward when Jesus said in the Great Commission, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." The motivation should not be to see other people glorify us, but to see other people glorify God. This is what God does with the Holy Spirit through us. We are His hands and feet, His words and heart. Saint Francis once said; "Preach the Gospel at all times, when necessary; use words." Trust me when I say that people are watching how you act, to see if you walk the walk. Not only by our words but by our actions people will know Christ and Glorify God.

And so we pray, Almighty and Eternal God, so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated to you; and then use us, we pray, as you will, and always to your glory and the welfare of your people; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.