

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I'd like us to begin today with a hymn. Please turn in your hymnals to # 703, O God, Why Are You Silent and keep it open to that page.

Today we begin by singing the first 2 stanzas,
the song of the widow.

O God, why are you silent? I cannot hear your voice;
the proud and strong and violent, all claim you and rejoice;
you promised you would hold me with tenderness and care.
Draw near, O Love, enfold me, and ease the pain I bear.

My hope lies bruised and battered, my wounded heart is torn
my spirit spent and shattered by life's relentless storm;
will you not bend to hear me, my cries from deep within?
Have you no word to cheer me when night is closing in?

Her husband has died. Her love, her companion, gone.

He has left her alone to raise their only child.

Somehow she and her son must survive with no source of income.

She grieves and worries but has no choice but to go on.

Then the heavens close up. The rain refuses to fall
and famine devastates the land.

Despair seeps in through the windows and under the doors
and fills their small home. After days and days,
the widow gathers her strength and ventures out
to gather up a few sticks to build a fire.

She will make a cake of bread with all the flour and oil
they have left. She and her son will eat it and then die.

Then the man of God, Elijah, comes. He asks her to use
her remaining oil and flour to feed him instead of her and her son.

He promises that God will provide the flour and oil needed
to feed them all. Somehow she complies to his request
and there is enough oil and flour for the three of them to eat.

The despair lifts but the widow still holds her breath.
She still needs space and time to heal.

Then the unthinkable happens. Her son has no breath left in him.
She clutches his lifeless body in her arms. Horror swallows her whole.
She spits at Elijah, "What have you against me, O man of God?
You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance,
and to cause the death of my son!"

Elijah and the widow both are shaken to the core.

Elijah wails to God, "O Lord my God, have you brought
calamity even upon the widow with whom I am staying,
by killing her son?"

What kind of God allows this to happen?

Who is this God whom we serve? Does God have
a mean streak hidden behind the good veneer?

Does he delight in kicking us when we are down?

Or is he a God who simply does not forget the past?

This widow obviously had some sin in her past
that she felt God had not forgiven. Does God keep score
and punish us way into the future for the wrong that we have done?

Maybe God does not intentionally bring suffering upon us.

Instead maybe he just gets distracted with other more important things
and absent-mindedly allows these bad things to happen?

Does God just not care that we or anyone suffers?

Does God simply turn his back on us and walk away?

Jesus, God of God, Light of Lights, enters the town of Nain
with his disciples and a large crowd of people.

As he approaches the town gate, he witnesses a funeral procession.

The people of the town are carrying out the only son of a widow.

With great compassion, Jesus is shaken to his core.

He touches the bier on which the man is lying and orders him to rise.

Life returns to the young man and Jesus gives him to his mother.

The man of God, Elijah, stretches himself upon the child three times begging God to let the child's life come into him again.

The boy revives. Elijah gives him to his mother and the widow's belief in God is restored.

Do we think that God looks out at the pain in this world and the pain in our own lives and is not deeply moved?

Like a good parent, does God not know and feel and understand our pain even better than we do ourselves?

Jesus does not simply come to us, pat us on the head, and offer us some platitudes of no worth. He doesn't even come to us in our horror and pain and remind us of our second lesson from last Sunday. "Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us."

What is said there is the truth, although it is probably not the most consoling words to receive in the midst of grief.

Jesus, out of his great compassion and love for us, reaches out and touches us at the very depths of our pain and grief, where we long and ache to be made whole, where death reigns supreme and all hope is lost.

It is into that darkness and pain that Jesus descends to rescue us. He alone has the power to enter there and to take what is dying and breath life into it once more.

To those of you who have experienced that kind of death and darkness in your life, there is no greater comfort than to realize that you do not dwell in it alone. Hope is to feel the strong and sure arms of God surround you and to know in your heart that resurrection is coming.

You don't know when it will be or what it will look like when it comes, but Jesus is breathing new life into you and you most certainly will rise. Hope does indeed live and will not disappoint us.

For those on the journey with these widows, what do you do?
What you are called to do is something extremely courageous.

Elijah says to the widow, "Give me your son."

And Elijah takes him from her bosom to bring him into the presence of God. Ultimately she hands to God what is most precious to her, all of her dead husband that she has left. She hands to God her future and her hope. She hands God her very life.

We too courageously hand to God what is most precious to us,
We hand to God the source of our pain,
the parts of us that are wounded.

We entrust God with our future and this present moment.

We place our entire lives in his gentle and merciful hands.

And in God we place all of our hope.

We courageously and confidently hope
that light will surely come out of this darkness,
that resurrection and new life will fill our lungs
and restore our souls, that wailing will turn into dancing,
that sackcloth will be shed and God will clothe us with joy
once again. And somehow, in some way,
we will be better, more like Christ Jesus himself
for having seen and lived this journey through.

From our pain you, God, will draw forth compassion.

From our loss, we bless others with wisdom and sensitivity.

From our healing, others on the journey gain hope
that they too can and will revive and heal.

May we end by praying and singing stanzas 3 & 4 of Hymn 703.

Through endless nights of weeping, through weary days of grief,

my heart is in your keeping, my comfort, my relief.
Come, share my tears and sadness, come, suffer in my pain,
oh, bring me home to gladness, restore my hope again.

May pain draw forth compassion, let wisdom rise from loss;
oh, take my heart and fashion the image of your cross;
then may I know your healing through healing that I share,
your grace and love revealing, your tenderness and care.