

TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF JESUS



Scripture:

Galatians 1:11-24

¹¹For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; ¹²for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

¹³You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it. ¹⁴I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. ¹⁵But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased ¹⁶to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being, ¹⁷nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus.

¹⁸Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days; ¹⁹but I did not see any other apostle except James the Lord's brother. ²⁰In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie! ²¹Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, ²²and I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea that are in Christ; ²³they only heard it said, "The one who formerly was persecuting us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy." ²⁴And they glorified God because of me.

Luke 7:11-17

¹¹Soon afterwards he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went with him. ¹²As he approached the gate of the town, a man who had died was being carried out. He was his mother's only son, and she was a widow; and with her was a large crowd from the town. ¹³When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and said to her, "Do not weep." ¹⁴Then he came forward and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, rise!" ¹⁵The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. ¹⁶Fear seized all of them; and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen among us!" and "God has looked favorably on his people!" ¹⁷This word about him spread throughout Judea and all the surrounding country.

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF JESUS

There is a Buddhist story that tells of a young woman whose child died. She walked from house to house, carrying him in her arms, asking if anyone could heal him. Finally she went to the Buddha, who listened to her story with sympathy and then said, 'To heal the child I need some poppy seeds. Go and bring me four or five poppy seeds from a home where death has never entered.' So the despairing woman set out. Eventually she came to understand the meaning of his words, and went out and buried the body of her child.

The point in this Buddhist story is that we all suffer, we all lose our loved ones eventually to death, and we all must face death and sorrow at some point in our lives. This is so true, and embracing that truth helps us see that we are not alone in our suffering and sorrows.

THREE RESURRECTION STORIES

The widow of Nain story had a different outcome; thanks be to God! When the widow of Nain encountered Jesus she had a transformative experience. No longer was she just a widow of Nain but she became the widow whose son died and was resurrected by Jesus.

This was the first of three resurrection miracles that Jesus performed: the son of the widow of Nain, Jairus's daughter, and Lazarus. Let's look at all three resurrections and see what point God was making in these resurrections.

Jesus came to show us how to live with one another and how to love and care for each other, and how deeply God loves us by sacrificing himself on our behalf. In all of his three years of ministry, Jesus used teaching moments to show what is important to God and that when we have true faith we are transformed.

Since there was a high mortality rate during the ancient days, there were many opportunities for Jesus to raise people from the dead. So why just these three? The teaching lessons in these

three resurrections show God's concern for the oppressed, the marginalized and the devalued.

Let's look at the three resurrection miracles Jesus performed and see what message we are to receive about God's work in the world.

LAZARUS

Jesus was a good friend of Lazarus. His sisters Mary and Martha had been very helpful in Christ's three years of ministry. So this resurrection was personal to Jesus and his deep feelings for Lazarus caused him to weep. Lazarus was like family to Jesus so he mourned and wept showing that God understands when we grieve, and mourn and cry. The shortest verse in the Bible occurs in the telling of this resurrection: "Jesus wept."

THE DAUGHTER OF JAIRUS

The raising of the daughter of Jairus is only recorded in the book of Mark. This was a lesson in compassion, patience and equality. On his way to heal the daughter of Jairus, Jesus is interrupted and heals a woman who had been hemorrhaging for twelve years. She most likely had fibroids causing the bleeding. Now they would just do a hysterectomy which was not possible back in those days.

So Jesus stopped to heal the bleeding woman even though it was taboo for a rabbi even to get close to a woman passing blood. After breaking the taboo and healing her, Christ traveled on to raise from the dead a little girl who was dearly loved by her important father, Jairus.

In Jairus's daughter's case, there are two distinctions in this story.

First, Jairus was an important Jewish ruler in the synagogue. His status and wealth gave him much prestige. But Jesus was not a popular rabbi in the synagogue, so it showed great love for his daughter and great respect for Jesus to request healing from him.

Then secondly, when Jesus allowed himself to be interrupted by a bleeding woman who was considered "unclean" due to her bleeding, those looking on learned a great lesson in humility. Christ made Jairus wait until he attended to the bleeding woman.

Wouldn't you expect Jairus to be very angry when Christ finally showed up and his daughter

was already dead? But the Bible doesn't record any complaints from Jairus. He was so patient and waited faithfully for Jesus to take his daughter's cold dead hand and raise her up.

Not only was that a lesson in faith and patience, but it was also a lesson in how God treats us all the same and we are valued equally.

Jairus and the bleeding woman were responded to equally. There was no preference for the wealthy ruler's daughter over the bleeding marginalized woman. Christ showed that both were of equal value to God.

And yet the fact that Jesus healed a female child broke the discrimination barrier of that time. Israel's patriarchal society preferred boys so much over girls, they did not keep statistical records on female child deaths, only male child deaths were kept in their historical records. So Christ showed that Jairus's daughter was just as important as the son of the widow of Nain by resurrecting her as he did the son of the widow.

THE WIDOW OF NAIN

The resurrection healing of the son of the widow of Nain had many other important teaching lessons within that story. Another was that even though Jesus had just finished healing the slave of the Centurion who he praised for having the deepest faith he had seen in Israel, Jesus did not require any sign of faith from the widow of Nain. He automatically healed her son. Why would he do that?

In those days, widows who were left on their own with no sons to care for them, were preyed upon and often died if they did not remarry. In ancient Israel the widows and the orphans were easy targets for robberies and slavery as they still are today in developing countries. God wants us to remember that widows and orphans deserve our care because they are the most vulnerable in our global society. The most easily neglected and oppressed of all.

BRING LIFE TO OTHERS

These three resurrection accounts call us to bring life and healing to others in whatever way we can.

You may not have the sacred power to raise people from the dead, but you can advocate and create systems that open the door to life for

people rather than allowing them to succumb to oppression and neglect.

And so today, as we reflect upon Christ's teachings in these resurrection accounts, we are called to bring life to others. Our God who is revealed to us in Jesus offers the way to abundant life for all.

JESUS CARES

Today Luke is telling us that Jesus cares about little people in a big way. He works in messy and miserable situations, in dark and difficult circumstances because He cares. The widow is restored to a place of protection and safety by Christ giving back her son. In so doing Jesus blesses this widow with a future. And it's not her faith or her prayer or forgiveness, but it's the Lord's unconditional compassion that transforms.

TRANSFORMATION

The two lectionary scriptures we read for today both reflect upon the transformative power of compassion. Paul's transformation described in the passage from Galatians reflects upon his complete turn around from being a murderous Christian persecutor to becoming the most successful compassionate evangelist for Christ that ever lived. Paul described himself as "The one who formerly was persecuting us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy."

That was a miracle transformation that helped Paul and the growth of the early church communities flourish.

**That same transformative power
is alive and well today.
Through the power of the Holy Spirit,
people are still being resurrected
spiritually and even physically
from near death to abundant life.**

ANNA

This testimony you are about to hear is a powerful example of turning one's life around through Christian compassionate transformation. Anna was formerly a professional escort who

had many near death experiences due to the abuse and violence inherent in that profession. I encourage you to look it up and watch the entire video because she miraculously survived many traumas.

Surprisingly, Anna had a childhood like many of us here today. She grew up in Minnesota and loved attending Sunday School. Anna did well academically in the early part of high school, but then she began to rebel against her very strict parents because they didn't protect her from an uncle who repeatedly abused her at home. Anna felt desperate and found a way to escape her abusive home by making money in an escort service in Minnesota which led to her running off to Las Vegas.

This part of the video that you will see gives you a sense of her transformation eventually empowered and inspired her to risk her life and guide other women to escape prostitution in Nevada. Let's listen to her transformation story. (A video was shown to the congregation.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EjlQdZBfkUw>

LIFE ABUNDANT

As the Buddha taught, we all suffer and die, but Christ taught us that we can have life abundant when we are compassionate, treat all people equally, have faith, act humbly, and love one another as God first loved us.

Be transformed, embrace the transformative power of Jesus and allow Christ to heal you where you need healing through the power of the Holy Spirit today. Amen

Benediction:

Let's challenge ourselves to transform and practice what we preach as disciples of Christ.

May we not only accept the bread of life and the cup of blessing into our bodies, but let's accept Christ's offer of transformation to be more like him in our daily lives.

Read your Bibles to remember how to be Christ-like. Come to worship to show your gratitude to God.

If you are traveling this summer, remember you can go to any church to show your gratitude to God. God will see you and bless you there, too.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. Amen



**Rev. Dr. Cindy Alloway
Presbyterian Church of the Roses
2500 Patio Court
Santa Rosa, CA 95405
June 5, 2016**