

Widow of Nain

What follows is inspired and interspersed with extracts from a prayer composed by the wonderful Nadia Bolz Webber.

There are moments in every life where coincidentally or otherwise, we experience perfect timing; that conversation or encounter, that unexpected kindness of a stranger; moments that were 'meant to be'.

One such moment occurs in this story we read today. With perfect timing it seems Jesus and his friends arrive at the gates of Nain just as a funeral procession is leaving. This could of course just be a coincidence, or was it? Just the previous day Jesus is in Capernaum, more than a day's walk from this forgettable, backwater, town which would never feature on any would-be Messiah's campaign trail. For Jesus to get there at that exact moment, most likely, he would have had to have walked through the night.

And still, Jesus comes to the out of the way places; to where we are; at any time; to meet us in the long watches of night or the cold light of morning, reaching out with that selfsame compassion.

God of compassion,

As you did in Nain, enter our city gates. Enter into the somber roads down which our hearses drive and the glad streets down which our children run. Enter the parks where the junkies shoot up and the yuppies listen to jazz. Walk uninvited into starter mansions and public housing and dorms and cheap motel rooms that charge by the hour. Stroll into the cool-air freezer section where the pregnant women escape the heat and the bus stop benches where the weary wait. Enter every law office and adult books store. Step into the spaces we say we feel your awesomeness and the places where we claim your forsakenness. Enter our city gates, God of Compassion as you did the city of Nain. And bless.

Jesus doesn't try to make sense of this senseless death of a young man stolen in his prime. Nor will not collude with those who say that this is God's will or God's punishment or that God needed his company. Instead, he has compassion. Con -

passio – literally, he suffers with. And that co-suffering leads him to bless; to channel life and love.

So, bless the things we mistakenly think are already dead. Bless that which we have already begun to carry out of town to bury. Bless our rocky marriages and our college age kids who smoke too much pot. Bless the person at work who we love to hate. Bless the young adult who wonders if they are too young to really be an alcoholic, and bless the 60 year old woman who's had too much work done. Bless the public school lunch ladies and the guy who stole my kid's bike. Bless the chronically sick. Bless the one who has no one. Bless what we call insignificant and which you call magnificent. Bless it all and love what only you can love: the ugly, and abandoned and unsanitary in the wash of humanity upon which you have nothing but a gleaming compassion when we have none.

When we have none. The culture of that day meant that a widow without a son to bring her into his home would have been destitute. With no way to support herself, the only options open would have been to beg or to prostitute or to starve. Jesus looked at this woman and he saw this; he saw her.

God of Compassion who saw the Widow of Nain, we thank you for seeing us. Seeing our loneliness and our bravery. Seeing the times we can't say what we need to. Seeing the ones who have never felt like they are enough but who you know already are and always have been. Seeing the moments when we are more than we thought we could be. Seeing what no one else can or will. Thank you for seeing as beautiful what we call ugly and that in your compassion you wipe away all tears. Teach us to see each other.

Jesus touched the bier, an act which made him ritually unclean in the eyes of the religion of his day. He touched the untouchable to show us that nothing is untouchable.

Reach out and raise us God of compassion. Touch us as you did the wood on which the widow's son lay and speak those same words to us: Young man arise. Little girl, get up. To we who think we are not worthy to be loved and medicate ourselves with food and booze and shopping, say "rise up". To us who have been hurt by those who say they follow you say "rise up". To those who feel unworthy of forgiveness say "rise up". To the ones who care for the least of these and who feel

too burnt out to keep going, say "rise up". To we who are holding onto resentments like a security blanket say "rise up". To those who hide their failings behind their good works say "rise up". To the unloved child who has no idea that one day they will change the world say "rise up".

Rise up. And still, we wrestle with that question 'why just that young man?'. Why does your power not still raise up our dead?'. And still, those questions hang silent, unanswered. So, we choose instead to trust you with all that is unsolved, unlived, unloved within us.

And when again God of Compassion, you have raised the dead...when again you have made whole that which is broken, when again you have ripped out my heart of stone and replaced it with a heart of flesh, when again you have reached into the graves we dig ourselves and loved us back to life...don't stop there. Help us, Lord. Like the young man of Nain help us to sit up and speak. Give us words that are not empty affirmation, but give us strong words, as real as the very soil from which you raised us.

Give us the words lord, but also give us the pause before the words. Please.

And then, as you did the son to his mother, give us one to another. Make us one in this fractured world. Our country is divided, neighbor against neighbor, world-view against world-view and we are so sure we are right and they are wrong. It's a mess down here, Lord, and we've prayed that whole "Thy kingdom come" line a LOT already so we might stop asking nicely. We need your Kingdom of love and grace and mercy to speed the hell up. And if that's not possible then open our eyes to where your kingdom already is taking root and growing among us, turn our eyes from our despair to any amount of light which is spreading, however small.

And help us to know when we do not have enough compassion for the road ahead, that you do, and that that is enough. Amen