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Christ Church Cathedral  
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The Second Sunday after Pentecost  
Proper 5, Year C

It was dark except for the glimmer of light that crept beneath her bedroom door. How long had she been in there? She didn't know anymore. Was it two hours or two days? The bed had been little comfort and the sedative seemed ineffective. One corner of the bedroom was stacked with pillows. A ripped lamp-shade, letters, pictures, books (including her Bible and Prayer Book) that had been thrown there in a fit of rage. Was it real or imagined? She kept hoping she would wake up to find it all a dream. But the swelling in her eyes and aching sides from the hours of crying kept reminding her that the pain of her loss was no illusion.

A friend had come over earlier—if you could call her a friend—to console her. The friend said it must've been something he had done or even something she had done. You see, God just wouldn't take him without a reason. The friend advised her to review her life and confess the hidden sin.

Her priest came—one day after the news arrived. He seemed nervous and ill at ease. He asked for a drink and talked about Church last Sunday. "Sorry to hear of your loss," he finally said. He was trying the best he knew to empathize, but he couldn't be quiet long enough to hear her or to hold her. "Who knows why these things happen, Surely God had his reason for taking him. Just trust in Him and everything will be alright." The priest was pleasant enough in a sort of generic, whitewashed kind of way.

The neighbors brought food. She thought if she saw another casserole she'd turn green. Funny, how food seems to be every person's emotional antidote.

The last visitor she remembered receiving was an old friend from college. He and her husband had been best friends. When the door had opened they just fell in each other's arms and cried. Later they shouted and screamed and swore at God, finally finishing a bottle of wine and telling stories about the years that they were in college together.

When he left there was the bed, the swollen eyes, aching sides, darkness, the exhaustion, and the light under the door. As sleep finally began to settle, she thought of the many prayers that had been offered for his healing. "Why—why God!?! Damn it, God. I want him back."

Healing and restoration to health are the order of the day. Elijah raises the widow's son from the dead in the reading from 1 Kings, while Jesus also raises a widow's son from the dead in the Gospel lesson. The purpose of each of these stories, in part, is to establish the divine authority of both Elijah and Jesus. Notice how the widow says in 1 Kings, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth." Also, in the Luke passage the people say of Jesus after he has raised the widow's son, "A great prophet has arisen among us! God has visited His people."

Beyond the confirmation of Jesus as Son of God and Elijah as a prophet and man of God, these passages also call on us to struggle with prayer and healing as signs and hallmarks of the coming Kingdom of God in its fullness.

Some among you might be inclined to disregard divine healing as a clear and present reality in our day-to-day lives. You might argue that there was a time, Christ's time, when God worked like this—but not anymore. This line of reasoning might suggest that these special signs were required to get the early Church off the ground. Today those kinds of signs aren't needed. In fact, they might even be a bit embarrassing. But to embrace this notion of God and healing, is to believe in a god who was at one time active in the events of the world but has in these latter days withdrawn, leaving the affairs of this world to this world. It's tough to love and trust a god that's there one minute and gone the next.

Someone else might argue that what we read in Scripture portrayed as miracles are not really miracles at all. Rather they are events, which took place that were beyond the scope of human understanding at that time in history. Today we have the technology and scientific knowledge to understand such things and find it no longer necessary to label them miracles. Such a person is likely to have problems with the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ. If they believe in a god at all, it is a distant god, detached and uninvolved. But how do you love a god so distant? How does one form a relationship with such a god?

There may yet be others who blindly attribute to God the power of taking and giving life and health. In this schema you have a very personal, intimate god who is involved in everything—who must constantly decide whose prayers to hear and whose not to hear. Ultimately, everything that happens happens according to God's will or towards that end—in the extreme, even the murder of six million Jews or a Tsunami in Indonesia or a flood in Nashville. I guess that's fine for some if you're not Jewish or a coastal resident of Indonesia or a homeowner in the Bordeaux neighborhood of North Nashville. But it does seem that the intimacy and neat corners of a relationship with this kind of god does not allow for much mercy or grace or forgiveness.

“God used to but not anymore.” “God never did and never will.” Or “God's got everything under control.” Many of us likely fall into one of these headings when it comes to the question of healing the pain, suffering, and death that we encounter day in and day out. All such headings, however, put us in an extraordinarily passive position. None recognize a fallen creation and the power that sin and suffering and death continue to exert. None recognize the work of Christ as breaking the back of sin and suffering and death's hold on creation. And none trusts in the long view—the promise that the Kingdom will be fully realized and creation restored—including the dead in Christ.

For the Christian, pain, suffering, and death are not illusions. They comprise the clear and present reality of a fallen world. Likewise for the Christian, the prayer for healing—the laying of an intercession before the throne of God—is not about manipulating divine will to a happy ending as much as it is claiming the life of the Kingdom for the people of God. It is persisting in the belief that the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ was not in vain. It is choosing to live today in the midst of a broken and fallen world, believing that by the power of God, the Kingdom of Heaven—the renewed Eden—will be restored.

It hurts when that prayer seems not to be answered. It hurts when I become impatient for the coming Kingdom. At times it can seem as if all is lost. But do not let this broken world become the defining characteristic of your life. Do not lose sight of the Cross and Empty Tomb. Fight for the Kingdom. Fight for the love of God. Pray after

the manner of the persistent widow in Luke 18 who would not set aside the daily badgering of a local judge, until he finally ruled in her favor. As an ambassador for the Kingdom of Heaven you make the case to the world for the New Jerusalem. You live by her laws and standards, hopes and dreams thereby demonstrating to the world what it means to be loved by God, what it means to be in relationship with our God, what it means to defy the power of sin, what it means to sing when all are mourning, and what it means to rejoice when the world would have us cry.

The question is not why does God heal some and not others. Or why did my husband die when my neighbor's is still alive. Or why does 'natural' catastrophe fall to some and not others. This would be to begin with me, with us, as if we were the center of all that is. Instead begin with God and every notion of right relationship with Him that comes through the hope of the coming Kingdom. The many healings of which read in Scripture and particular in the life of Jesus, are signs of the Great Thaw. When the Kingdom of Heaven in the person of Jesus walks through the valley of the shadow of death—the blind see, the lame walk, the deaf are made to hear, the dead rise, and the possessed are released from their bondage.

Fight with God for the fullness of his Kingdom. Be persistent in bringing your petition before the throne of God. Pray for the life of the world—even as you grieve and mourn and in the occasional forgetful moment despair. Pray for the detail, pray for the specific, continually lift up this world for God's blessing and healing. May the lines at our prayer stations in the Cathedral Chapel during the Eucharist be long and the work of the Kingdom be made present in your life.

Every ambassador holds up the hope of peace. He may live in the midst of war. Her family may suffer from the effects of last night's attack or from the disease that lays waste at midday. But he does not lose sight of the prize. With her every breath she labors for the peace that comes on the morrow, the joy that comes in the morning.

Read these stories of Elijah and Jesus this morning, hear of the miraculous raising from the dead and know that the Kingdom of Heaven has come near you. Weeping may come for the night but joy comes in the morning. That is the promise you have to claim for the world. That is hope of healing. That is the promise of resurrection.