

Hillcrest Congregational Church, UCC
Rev. Dr. Loletta M. Barrett
June 6, 2010
Defibrillators and Resuscitation
I Kings 17:8-24, Luke 7:11-17

It was in church one day during the sharing of joys and concerns that Caroline gave her testimony. She said it quietly and concisely. The joy she shared was that her only child had heart problems, but thankfully he was okay. There was nothing much to it, and I didn't think much about it until the next week, when I remembered to ask her how her son's recovery was coming. That was when she told me the story. There was a LOT to it.

Her son and his family had gone on vacation. They had flown, and when they returned to the airport, he left his wife and family standing with their luggage on the curb while he went to get the car. His heart attack happened when he was driving the car up to the loading area where they were standing. He lost control of the car and swerved into a pole on the other side of the street in front of them. The airport security guards came and used a defibrillator and they were able to resuscitate him.

But here is the real story. He had a massive heart attack that should have killed him. The car should have hit and perhaps killed others, maybe even his own family. In spite of hitting the pole, he was not injured. The security guards were right there and responded immediately. They had just come on duty and were the

only ones trained to use the defibrillators. They had trained the day before, and the defibrillators had been installed only a few days. And thanks be to God, they were able to resuscitate him. This story was a joy to share, all over and over it. Divine serendipity came and happened and happened.

Today's story about Elijah is like that too. Elijah is one of the foremost prophets in the Hebrew testament. He lived during the time of very corrupt king in Israel's history. In fact, in I Kings 16:32, it says that King Ahab "did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel than all the kings of Israel that were before him." King Ahab married Queen Jezebel- yes Jezebel. She was from Sidon where they worshipped Baal, and Ahab not only turned away from God, but put idols of Baal to worship in the temple.

God sent Elijah to tell King Ahab that his behavior will cause a horrible drought in the land. This makes Elijah public enemy number one. So he flees to the wilderness for a while where God takes care of him. But the drought catches up to Elijah and so in our story today, God sends him to a widow for sustenance. But the drought is so bad that the widow is in the process of making one last meal for her son and herself before they die.

Along comes Elijah asking for food and water. And strangely enough she gives it to him! Then she lets him come and stay in her home! This woman was ready to die, ready to make her last meal. Now she is offering hospitality?!

Elijah is an outlaw in a foreign land. He has received hospitality not only from a complete stranger, but someone who does not worship God, a woman who should be below his notice, a widow with no man to care for her, and it goes without saying, someone who is poverty stricken. But her hospitality is more than rewarded.

First, her ability to provide for herself and her son is assured- she has a constant supply of flour and oil throughout the time of the drought. Second, when her son becomes so sick that there was no breath left in him, Elijah uses his own body as a defibrillator, performs some sort of “holy CPR” and resuscitates him. Divine serendipity brought Elijah and the widow and her son together. It results in the woman recognizing God’s powerful presence.

A similar kind of divine serendipity happens in our story about Jesus. He happens to be coming into the village of Nain when the widow and procession are taking her only son out to bury him. He raises the son from the dead, and the scripture specifically says Jesus returns him to his mother. The witnesses of this event realized that God’s presence is among them.

Now these stories have four things in common. The women were widows and had already experienced a loss. In Elijah and Jesus’ time especially, widows were the least of all, without a husband they had no one to care for them. In all

three stories there is a resuscitation of only sons. Not only were children returned to their mothers, sons who assured them a future, were restored.

And we see the powerful presence of God, which results in the resurrection of hope. Hope resurrected in the lives of the women and their sons together, in the disciples and crowd surrounding Jesus, in the neighbors and friends of these women to whom they told the story, in us hearing and telling the stories.

But we also see compassion in all these stories. The compassion of the people who ensured the security guards were trained and had equipment, the compassion of the security guards, of Elijah, and of Jesus. Jesus sees the mother weeping. In each of these stories we can imagine the mother weeping. But Jesus says, “do not weep,” not chastising the woman, or being afraid or ashamed of her tears, but because God’s compassion will restore her son.

The compassion of God is expressed in each of these experiences. It is the compassion that we are called to be for the people around us: the widows, the poor, the stranger, the orphan, the hungry, the lame, the blind, the least of these. Out of compassion we are called to be God’s defibrillators, to bring about resuscitation, to resurrect hope.

compassion flows
like a gentle river
with the power of a flood
through a marching band in step

in random clown's feet

compassion flows
to counteract pain's presence
loss's agony
with a song for the heart
and a hope reborn

compassion flows
with an invitation
to risk joining
leaving expectations
behind

compassion flows
toward emptiness
touching what is not there
revealing
restoring¹

Compassion flows- out of us. May it be so.

¹ Wesley White <http://kcmlection.blogspot.com/2007/06/pentecost-2-sunday-c4.html>