

FIVE PENTACOST 6-28-21

WISDOM OF SOLOMON 1:13-15, 2:23-24 PSALM 30

2 CORINTHIANS 8:7-15 MARK 5:21-43

GOOD MORNING

TODAY'S READINGS AND GOSPEL WEAVE LESSONS WITH BELIEVING AND TRUST THAT OUR LORD GOD WILL DELIVER US.

ALTHOUGH WISDOM OF SOLOMON WAS TRADITIONALLY ATTRIBUTED TO KING SOLOMON, THE ANONYMOUS AUTHOR WAS INSTEAD A LEARNED HELLENIZED JEW OF ALEXANDRIA. THE BOOK, WHICH WAS PROBABLY WRITTEN AROUND THE END OF THE FIRST CENTURY BC, TO PROVIDE STRENGTH AND ENCOURAGEMENT TO JEWS. IT DESCRIBES AND PRAISES THE NATURE OF SOPHIA OR LADY OF WISDOM. THE VERSES FOR TODAY FOCUS ON A MAJOR THEME OF THE BOOK; DEATH DOES NOT COME FROM GOD. "GOD DID NOT MAKE DEATH, AND HE DOES NOT DELIGHT IN THE DEATH OF THE LIVING." INDEED, WE ARE MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD'S OWN ETERNITY. THE GENERATIVE FORCES OF THE WORLD

ARE GOOD, AND “THERE IS NO DESTRUCTIVE POISON IN THEM. RIGHTEOUSNESS IS IMMORTAL” AND IT IS WICKEDNESS THAT LEADS TO DEATH: “THROUGH THE DEVIL’S ENVY DEATH ENTERED THE WORLD, AND THOSE WHO BELONG TO HIS COMPANY EXPERIENCE IT.”

AS OUR GOSPEL PASSAGE BEGINS, JESUS IS TEACHING BY THE SEA OF GALILEE WHEN JAIRUS, A LEADER OF THE SYNAGOGUE, COMES TO HIM. JAIRUS FALLS AT JESUS’ FEET IN A GESTURE OF RESPECT AND PETITION, BEGGING HIM TO COME AND HEAL HIS YOUNG DAUGHTER, WHO IS NEAR DEATH. WE TEND TO FORGET THE SACRIFICE OF PROPRIETY THAT JAIRUS MAKES IN PERSONALLY HUMBLING HIMSELF BEFORE A RADICALLY UNCONVENTIONAL HOLY MAN OUT OF NAZARETH – A TOWN OF QUESTIONABLE REPUTATION.

PERHAPS HE HAS HEARD ABOUT JESUS IN CAPERNAUM; OR MAYBE HE WITNESSED THE HEALING OF THE MADMAN IN THE SYNAGOGUE WHERE HE WAS A RULER. OR MAYBE BOTH OF THESE INCIDENTS LED JAIRUS TO BELIEVE THAT JESUS COULD HEAL HIS DAUGHTER. WE HAVE NEVER

HEARD THE “BACKSTORY” OF HOW JIRUS CAME TO BE A BELIEVER, ALTHOUGH A LEADER IN THE SYNAGOGUE.

BUT AS JESUS AND THE CROWD SET OFF FOR JAIRUS’ HOME, A WOMAN WHO HAS SUFFERED FROM HEMORRAGE FOR TWELVE YEARS COMES UP BEHIND HIM. ALTHOUGH SHE HAS GONE TO SEVERAL PHYSICIANS, HER CONDITION CONTINUED TO WORSEN; AND NOW HER FINANCES ARE DRAINED AS WELL. SHE BELIEVES SHE CAN BE HEALED BY SIMPLY TOUCHING JESUS’ CLOTHING.

ACTING WITH COURAGE AND INITIATIVE, THE WOMAN REACHES OUT FOR HIS CLOAK AND IS IMMEDIATELY HEALED OF THE DISEASE. AT THE SAME MOMENT, JESUS FEELS POWER LEAVE HIM AND ASKED WHO TOUCHED HIM. IN FEAR AND TREMBLING, A REACTION OF AWE IN THE PRESENCE OF DIVINE POWER, THE WOMAN COMES FORWARD. DISREGARDING CULTURAL BARRIERS BY TALKING TO A WOMAN IN PUBLIC, JESUS COMMENDS HER FAITH, TELLING HER TO GO IN PEACE AND BE HEALED OF YOUR DISEASE.

THE INSERTION OF THIS EVENT IN THE NARRATIVE SERVES TO INCREASE THE TENSION – FOR AS JESUS TURNS AWAY

FROM THE WOMAN, WORD IS RECEIVED THAT JAIRUS' DAUGHTER HAS DIED. AS A RESULT, THE CROWD INSISTS THAT THERE IS NO FURTHER NEED TO TROUBLE JESUS. BUT JESUS REASSURES JAIRUS, SAYING, "DO NOT FEAR, ONLY BELIEVE".

WHEN JESUS ARRIVES AT JAIRUS' HOME, THE CROWD IS ALREADY MOURNING THE DEATH OF THE CHILD WITH GREAT WEEPING AND WAILING. WHEN JESUS INSISTS THAT "THE CHILD IS NOT DEAD BUT SLEEPING", THE MOURNERS LAUGH AT THE COMMON SAYING FOR DEATH.

TAKING ONLY PETER, JAMES, JOHN AND THE CHILD'S PARENTS WITH HIM, JESUS ENTERS THE HOUSE. HE TAKES THE CHILD BY THE HAND (THEREBY BREAKING THE TABOO AGAINST TOUCHING A CORPSE) AND ADDRESSES HER AS IF HE WERE INDEED SPEAKING TO SOMEONE ASLEEP, TELLING HER TO GET UP IN THE ARAMAIC WORDS "TALITHA CUM".

HERE IT IS SPOKEN WORDS OF JESUS THAT BRINGS ABOUT THE MIRACLE. HER LIFE REVIVED, THE GIRL OBEYS THE COMMAND OF JESUS TO STAND UP. JESUS THEN ORDERS THAT SHE BE GIVEN SOMETHING TO EAT, TO DEMONSTRATE

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE CURE. AND JESUS AGAIN WARNS THOSE PRESENT *NOT TO TELL ANYONE*. I HAVE OFTEN THOUGHT – HOW COULD ANYONE NOT SPEAK OF THESE MIRACLES!

THE IMAGERY AND LANGUAGE USED THROUGHOUT THIS STORY FORESHADOW THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS, AND EMPHASIZE THAT *GOD IS INDEED THE GOD OF THE LIVING* AND NOT OF THE DEAD. WE ARE ALSO REMINDED HERE OF THE RAISING OF LAZARUS; THE REVIVING OF THE WIDOW'S SON BY ELIJAH; AND THE ACCOUNT OF ELISHA AND THE SON OF THE SHUNAMMITE WOMAN.

THERE IS A MARKED CONTRAST BETWEEN THE TWO MAIN CHARACTERS IN THESE STORIES. JAIRUS IS A LEADER IN THE SYNAGOGUE; WHILE THE UNNAMED WOMAN IS AMONG THE MARGINALIZED OF SOCIETY BECAUSE OF HER GENDER AND ILLNESS. HOWEVER, BOTH IN THEIR ACTIONS DEMONSTRATE THE NATURE OF FAITH AS HUMBLE TRUST AND RELIANCE ON THE GRACE AND POWER OF GOD.

THE EPISTLE GIVES US BASIC, DOWN-TO-EARTH, DOABLE INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO HELP THE POOR IN OUR MIDST. SO OFTEN WHEN WE THINK ABOUT *WHAT WE MUST DO TO BE LIKE JESUS*, WE THINK ABOUT WHAT JESUS SAID TO THE RICH YOUNG MAN, “SELL ALL YOU HAVE AND GIVE IT TO THE POOR”. WE TAKE THAT VERSE RIGHT OUT OF CONTEXT AND WE THEN THINK TO OURSELVES, *THAT WILL NEVER WORK FOR ME*, AND THEN MAYBE WE FEEL THERE’S NOTHING WE REALLY CAN DO.

WE SAY TO OURSELVES, WE *NEED* TO BE ABLE TO LIVE A DECENT LIFESTYLE AND WE *NEED* TO PROVIDE FOR OUR FAMILIES. YES, WE DO – AND PAUL REMINDS US JUST WHAT GOD INTENDS WHEN ALL THROUGH THE SCRIPTURES WE HEAR THAT WE MUST CARE FOR THE POOR.

WHEN WE TAKE THE TIME TO THINK CAREFULLY ABOUT IT, WE KNOW THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF WAYS WE ACTUALLY CAN, AND VERY OFTEN *DO*, CARE FOR THOSE IN NEED. I THINK, THOUGH, THAT PAUL GIVES US THE BASIC PHILOSOPHY OF GIVING: “FOR IF THE EAGERNESS IS THERE, THE GIFT IS ACCEPTABLE ACCORDING TO WHAT ONE HAS -

- NOT ACCORDING TO WHAT ONE DOES NOT HAVE.” THAT MAKES SO MUCH SENSE. “I DO NOT MEAN THAT THERE SHOULD BE RELIEF FOR OTHERS AND PRESSURE ON YOU, BUT IT IS A QUESTION OF A FAIR BALANCE BETWEEN YOUR PRESENT ABUNDANCE AND THEIR NEED, SO THAT THEIR ABUNDANCE MAY BE FOR YOUR NEED, IN ORDER THAT THERE MAY BE A FAIR BALANCE.”

THERE IT IS – BALANCE. YES, WE MIGHT BE CALLED TO GIVE UNTIL WE FEEL A PINCH; OTHERS MAY BE CALLED TO GIVE EVERYTHING; BUT MOST ARE CALLED TO HELP SHIFT THE BALANCE SO THAT THE POOR HAVE A CHANCE.

OF COURSE, IT’S NOT ALWAYS MONEY THAT’S NEEDED. THE WAY WE HELP OTHERS OUT OF POVERTY BEGINS WITH US OPENING OUR EYES AND OUR EARS TO SEE AND HEAR THEIR VOICES TELLING US WHAT WOULD HELP. WE NEED TO BELIEVE THOSE VOICES AND NOT BE AFRAID TO STAND UP TO ADDRESS THE SINFULNESS OF A SOCIAL SYSTEM THAT ALLOWS PEOPLE TO LIVE IN ABJECT POVERTY. NOT ONLY ALLOWS, BUT PROMOTES THE WELFARE SYSTEM AS A WAY OF LIFE.

PAUL REMINDS US “AS IT IS WRITTEN, ‘THE ONE WHO HAD MUCH DID NOT HAVE TOO MUCH, AND THE ONE WHO HAD LITTLE DID NOT HAVE TOO LITTLE.’” BALANCE, CARE, GENEROSITY, LOVE, COMPASSION, *YOU ARE MY BROTHER OR SISTER* – THINK ABOUT THESE WORDS THE NEXT TIME YOU’RE FACE TO FACE WITH SOMEONE IN NEED.

AMEN