

## Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany – February 2, 2025

1 Kings 17:17–24; Psalm 146; 1 Corinthians 15:12–26; Luke 7:11–17

### “Compassion and healing”

1. The call came to my office number at the church. A ten-year-old child, Brandon, had been killed in a freak accident at home. The grandparents Jake and Vonda were pillars of the church, the parents Joey and Elaine had been trying to get more involved in church. I was being requested to go to their home.
  - a. At that moment I had been out of seminary for a year or two. I had done a few funerals already, but only older members.
  - b. Never a child.
  - c. The family was waiting for me at their home and I needed to get going, but as I walked from my office to the front door of the church, I walked by the sanctuary, dark without its lights on.
    - i. I stepped in and sat on a pew. And wept.
    - ii. Wept for the parents, and grandparents,
    - iii. wept for Brandon whom I hadn't met (and I would later find out he had been asking his mom to get him baptized).
    - iv. Wept in fear for myself, because they were going to be looking to me for some help, some guidance, some comfort from this wet-behind-the-ear rookie pastor.
    - v. I prayed for God to use and guide me.
    - vi. And what I now realize is that God was already going ahead of me, because the community, the neighbors were already pouring their support.
    - vii. The community was experienced in the ways of compassion and healing.
    - viii. They knew how to grieve, how to hold each other up, how to quietly take care of things seamlessly taking care of the grieving family – mowing a yard or helping to bring in the corn or soybean harvest.
    - ix. The community knew how to care for each other in joy and in sorrow.
    - x. I would be as much pastor as I would be a student that week.
      1. Learning grace. Offering grace.
  - d. There were no miracles in my story, of course.
    - i. No Jesus walking up and touching the casket for the child to revive.
    - ii. No Elijah crying out to God and God offering resurrection.
    - iii. That feels so... foreign, doesn't it?
    - iv. We tell ourselves: well, maybe back then, but not now.
  - e. But you know what, not even those families in the Bible stories expected the miracle.
    - i. Both those widows had lost their sons, and they were distraught.
    - ii. They were still in shock.
    - iii. One was angry at the prophet, the other was unaware of Jesus' presence.
    - iv. Maybe both were wondering where God had been in their moment of greatest need.
  - f. But I imagine their communities had already started showing them love
    - i. preparing a body for burial, preparing a meal for those gathered.

- ii. There was shared pain because there was shared love.
    - iii. And in the midst of the tragedy were the seeds of shared healing.
  - g. The communities doubled down on the emotional work that was already a part of their DNA – celebrate in joy, grieve in loss, support in healing.
    - i. Yes, Elijah’s prayer was eventually answered, and the child lived.
    - ii. Yes, Jesus’ words brought the child back, and he lived.
    - iii. And generations would talk about both of those miracles.
    - iv. We’re STILL talking about them!
    - v. No miracle in that.
    - vi. Or, ALL miracle – the miracle of a community willing to be vulnerable with each other, catching each other in the moments of greatest need.
- 2. Tragedies can happen in an instant or build painfully slow, and our response creates the space for picking up the pieces.
  - a. But first the job of community is to create a place of trust, of growing, of possibility – even when possibilities are tragically cut short.
  - b. Last week I reminded myself and you to breathe.
    - i. Not because we don’t know how to breathe, but because in the stress of life we barely survive with shallow breaths
  - c. So this week I’m reminding you to be vulnerable.
    - i. Not because you don’t know how to, but because in the midst of difficulty and pain, our reflex may be to withdraw and shut down.
    - ii. And who am I to tell you not to do that?
    - iii. But those of us around you, who are trying to be in solidarity with you,
      - 1. we can be vulnerable too and open our hearts with compassion and service,
      - 2. normalizing what the song says : “everybody hurts sometime”
      - 3. modeling that people of faith can hurt together and heal together.
      - 4. Even when something like the death of a child leaves a wound which will never fully fully heal or close.
- 3. We care for each other.
  - a. You cared for me last week.
    - i. You held me up with prayer and generous acts of kindness.
    - ii. We seek to build community with unhoused neighbors at Hot Meals so they know we’re being vulnerable together.
    - iii. We hold in our hearts those fretting getting that scary medical diagnosis,
    - iv. we hold in our hearts a young child returning from school to discover their parents have been deported.
  - b. Tragedies, all of them.
  - c. And so we lean into our theological DNA, believing God works through us, calling us to daring action, to compassion.
- 4. Sometimes God gives us healing—but sometimes that healing doesn’t come. We carry the physical and emotional scars of that reality. We as a church aren’t the Prophet or the Messiah. But we can be the faithful crowd pressing in, the family bringing food to comfort the soul and to create a space ready for celebration, grief, or even just for waiting for what happens next.