

Sermon for 5 June 2016.

Today's gospel story is one of my favourites and there are many reasons for that, but the main reason is because in the narrative a clear picture emerges of the very nature of Jesus personal commitment and love towards us and just how powerful that love is.

In the story, we witness the all-encompassing compassion that Jesus had for a woman who has lost everything that makes for life – with the death of her son.

This particular story is found only in the gospel of Luke.

As the story goes – Jesus enters a town just as a man who had died was being carried out.

The man was his mother's only son, and she was a widow.

When Jesus saw her he had compassion for her and he spoke to her. "Do not weep" he said.

Now for the woman, who was also a widow, to have lost her only son meant that she was left without any male support or protection – and in a patriarchal society this meant that in her everyday life –her day to day living – she would be isolated, very much alone and very vulnerable.

And we remember here how Jesus gave his mother to the disciple whom he loved as he hung on the cross.

He wanted to ensure that she was supported and cared for by someone that he knew and loved.

Such was his provision even in the face of death.

The woman's fate in today's story was very grim. With the death of her son - what made for life for her- was dead.

Jesus first response to the scenario was to focus on the person who was most affected by the event. He encountered the woman.

Nothing stood in his way from showing her the compassion that she needed. He first speaks to her and then he moves to touch the bier.

The word *Soros* in one translation often means a coffin, but it was also used for a bier.

While the Jews sometimes used coffins, it was their practice, we learn from the historian Josephus, to use the open bier.

As Jesus touched the bier on which the body lay wrapped in a shroud, he crossed the boundaries of the laws of purity that forbade the touching of a corpse.

Nothing stopped him, - Jesus did what the compassion of God would have him do. Jesus then directly spoke to the dead man "Young man I say to you rise."

And the man sat up and spoke, which left the crowd in no doubt that he again had the breathe of God in his lungs and was indeed alive.

For the people present, they stood in awe and gave thanks to God.

The event reflected the story of the prophet Elijah – and we heard the first part of the reading today.

The similarities of Jesus' action to that of Elijah in raising the only son of a widow of Zarephath evokes the reaction of the crowd.

They thought of Jesus as a great prophet and word soon spread around the countryside.

Now why is this such a powerful story for us in today's world? Well the living word continually speaks to us on many levels.

In this case it speaks about more than a man nearly 2000 years ago being restored to life from death– It proclaims in a very real way the Good News that Christ enters directly into our suffering, in the present time, when the things that make for life, are dead.

He speaks to us directly and he touches us personally.

He engages with us in a compassionate loving way that gives us the breathe of life. That is the good news of the gospel and I believe something of the reasoning behind Pauls insistence in his letter to the Galatians, that he has the authority to preach the good news the way he did, because it had been revealed to him directly, and not by human agency.

Paul had been spoken to directly by Jesus Christ, he himself had been touched by the Risen Lord.

Now I know that the direct compassion of Christ gifted to us in our suffering and for that matter in our joy, may well come through an act of kindness or the words or actions of another person.

Perhaps a friend, a loved member of the family, a priest or minister-

It may come through a book or a reading that we have read, but however it comes it doesn't lessen the directness of the compassionate power that Christ gives to us.

He speaks into our suffering and he touches us in it in whatever way is best for us.

This story in Luke carries that truth home to us I believe.

And whenever we receive this truth, we are better equipped with courage to lean into him in our suffering and into a deeper peace illuminated by the light that shines from the face of Christ.

In him we are able, just as he was able, to enter the suffering of another in compassion and be a healing presence.

We are able to enter the fragility of the world without being overcome, but rather encouraged by a sensitivity of its preciousness.

I believe today's gospel passage shows us clearly the good news of the gospels in the power of love in the living word in today's world.

The Lord be with you.