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When I was living in Italy, a joke that made the rounds for a while concerned the Italian National Lottery. It seems that one day, a man walked into one of the larger churches in downtown Rome and started praying to The Lord about the needs he had due to the loss of his job. So, the man prayed that he would win the lottery that week. The next Friday, the same man returned to the church and brought before the Lord not only the loss of his job, but also the fact that his children needed new shoes. So he prayed to win the lottery that week. And, on Friday of the third week, the man returned to the church and prayed earnestly. He reminded the Lord about the loss of his job, his children's lack of shoes, and this time he added the fact that his sick wife was in desperate need of medical attention. And he prayed to God, once again, that he would win the lottery. This time, as the man was rising from his knees at the altar rail, he heard a deep voice coming to him from behind the cross. And the deep voice said..." All-right already! Give me a break!! Buy a ticket!!!"

The story about the lottery ticket is entertaining, but contains like all good jokes an ironic morsel of truth. So often, we won't take the first real step to solve our problems. So often, we won't take that first crucial step to combat the calamities of this life. And that crucial first step is always a step of faith.

What may not be immediately apparent to you about both the Old Testament Lesson and the Gospel reading from this morning is that both accounts concern the same calamity which has befallen a widow. The Old Testament passage from First Kings concerns a widow living in the region of Sidon, along what is today the coast of Lebanon. And a childless widow in that culture was a person with absolutely no visible means of support. Without a husband to provide for her, and without a son to take her into his household, the childless widow was really a person on whom a death sentence had been pronounced.

And notice how in the Gospel passage from Luke 7, Jesus restores to life the son, once again, of a widow, who was among the most vulnerable person in the society of Jesus' day. Widows and orphans were really people without hope of a decent life. Only God could rectify this situation. Only God could resolve this particular calamity.

So, why would God let such calamity be visited on such a helpless person? Well, I've come to believe that the reason God lets calamity come to pass in our lives is very often so that His name might be glorified when such calamity is miraculously and gloriously vanquished by God's mercy.

The account in Luke 7 of resurrecting the widow's son is actually the first of three miracles in the Gospels where Jesus raises someone from the dead.¹ And in this morning's Gospel reading, the raising of the Widow's son in Nain, we are told that Jesus had compassion for this grieving mother when he saw her. Jesus looked into this widow's heart and saw her need. But evidently, He also saw something else. He saw her willingness to believe. Jesus saw her faith.

¹ The other two instances of Jesus restoring the dead to life are in Luke 8, where Jesus raises the daughter of Jairus, the ruler of the Synagogue in Capernaum, and of-course the raising of Lazarus in John 11.

There was a great faith in the hearts of both of these widows we heard about this morning. Because both of these women possessed a faith born of desperation; the faith of a desperate soul with nowhere else to turn. This is why God so often lets us fall into these seemingly hopeless situations, so that we will be forced, once again, to turn to the only hope we have left. So that we are obliged to once again renew our faith.



Van Gogh's *The Raising of Lazarus*

And that's what's needed to bring true glory to God. You see, for God to do really great things in us, and through us, we truly need to be "all-in." We really need to have nowhere else to turn. To develop this kind of mature, complete faith we have to be totally dependent on Him, on His love, and on His mercy. And when we are, then great things do happen.

But sadly, many people only get a portion of the grace and mercy that God aches to shower down upon us. Even in their most desperate times, many people just aren't willing to take this critical step of faith, this commitment to be "all in" for the Lord. And so they go through his world leading "half-lives." And, tragically, when you confront these people of half-faith about what's lacking in their lives, so often their reaction is one of angry resentment. That's actually what happened to Our Lord in Luke's Gospel when He confronted the people in his home town of Nazareth about their lack of real faith.

In Luke Chapter 4, when Jesus reproached the home-town folks about their unwillingness to believe, we read that those homies became so angry, they actually tried to throw Jesus off a cliff. (See Lk. 4:28-29) Isn't that our reaction too? Don't we get our hackles up when God sends a prophet into our own lives to sound the alarm? When God tries to tell us that we are not receiving the full measure of His grace because we aren't being truly faithful, don't we get angry and resentful too?

So, let me ask you this morning; in the challenges you are facing, in the pain that you are going through, is it possible that the hand of God is at work? Is God bringing someone or something into your life to challenge you to greater faith, to guide you to a greater dependence on His mercy and His grace? If so, my dear friends, allow me to gently suggest that you take a moment to understand how your faith in His goodness might be increased. You're life will be so incredibly enriched if you do. So, in the midst of our challenges, I want to invite all of you to go ahead and be "all in." Go ahead, take that step of absolute faith toward the incredible journey of the true believer. Go ahead... Buy a ticket!

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen JWB+ 04-05-2016