

**Show us your mercy Lord, and grant us your healing grace, Amen.**

**We have moved into the season after Pentecost called ordinary time. Rather than meaning "common" or "mundane," this term comes from the word "ordinal," which simply means counted time. Ordinary time includes the Sundays after Pentecost to the beginning of Advent. In this long season, the lectionary highlights sections of scripture that focus on various aspects of faith, especially the mission of the church. The color for Ordinary time is green, associated with new life and growth and symbolizes the hope of resurrection in the world.**

**The readings today are all about resurrection and hope. In both the Old Testament and Gospel we heard miraculous stories of healing. It's comforting to believe that God meets our brokenness with mercy and care. But these accounts can also evoke confusion and disillusionment, when the miracle we hope for is not realized. From the messy, unfinished edges of life, how many of us have called out to challenge God? How do we reconcile the gap between our sorrows and God's promises?**

**If we examine these healing stories carefully we notice that often grace comes unbidden, at the least expected times. Luke's story places Jesus at the gate of the village Nain, in the midst of a funeral procession. A woman supported on each arm by her friends, wailed in anguish as they walked towards the grave where they would lay her only son. This procession was rather ordinary, as illness came quickly to those without means and death was common even among the young. The cries of a desolate mother hung in the air. The loss of her son meant her own death in many ways. She would now live on the margins of society dependent upon others for her survival.**

**Jesus was moved to compassion. The Greek word used in this passage suggests a deeply felt ache. It was this gut wrenching response that compelled Jesus to approach her and gently say, "Do not weep." As Jesus gave the son back to his mother, her shattered life was restored. Those witnessing the unexpected in-breaking of divine power were seized with fear. This was not the power of conquest but of mercy. Jesus enacted signs of a kingdom that lifted**

**up the suffering and weak, as he tended ones from whom others had turned away. His compassion evidenced God's loving nature in human form, bridging the gap between their sorrow and God's promise of new life. Jewish culture taught that obedience to the law, piety and privilege were the means to God's favor. Grace, given unearned was surely misunderstood.**

**I am not certain this miracle of compassion would be any better understood today. If our culture's prevailing attitude is that we deserve only what we earn, this leaves us rather short on mercy. It's easy to allow the needs of others to fall to the periphery, staying at a safe distance from suffering. One of the risks of entering into the stories of those in need is that we can be confronted with our own fears of loss. When trouble meets us, we understand pain from that gut level. Adversity tends to even the playing field.**

**In a film series entitled "Celebrate the Cracks," Stephanie Spellers, the Presiding Bishop's Canon for evangelism said, "We need a God who knows something about brokenness. Jesus is God's response to our yearning. Wanting us to see God's face in the person**

**of Jesus, God reaches out to know us and be known.” Jesus put a human face on the divine and became the face of love. Spellers suggests that when we put on the face of love and meet people where they are, we become harbingers of God’s hope. Compassion means literally to “suffer with” and it is God’s heart in us that gives us the courage to make ourselves vulnerable. When we do, we are blessed in unexpected ways.**

**Theologian and writer Henri Nouwen was a Catholic priest and professor at the Divinity schools of Harvard and Yale. He wrote several books on the spiritual life, many focusing on the subject of compassion. Nouwen lived and worked within a Trappist monastery and in the early 1980s lived among the poor in Peru. Towards the end of his career he followed a call as pastor to the L’Arche “Daybreak” community, serving the developmentally disabled. His relationships with the residents taught him about the mutuality of compassion. He wrote in his book Here and Now, “It is not excelling, but serving that makes us most human. To be with others when they suffer and to enter willingly into a fellowship of**

**the weak is God's way to justice and peace among people." Jesus showed the way of compassion by how he lived. We are called to claim this identity for ourselves and say, "We are the living Christ today." Will we respond to that same ache within us that compels us to care? As we give of ourselves, we surely move towards our own healing and wholeness.**

**This evening Holy Cross will hold a fundraiser to support a team of missionaries to go to Tanzania this summer. This group will serve along- side our Tanzanian brothers and sisters to be that face of love for those who live without resources. I pray that we can stand in the gap between their sorrow and God's promise of new life. But we do not have to go to Africa to practice compassion. Taking time to enter into another's story, to lend a hand, to wipe a tear opens the possibility of mutual transformation. As participants in God's compassion we are reconciled with one another, which in itself, is a healing miracle. Henri Nouwen puts it, "whenever we touch the broken hearted we touch the heart of God."**

**Our story this morning is good news not because the widow of Nain got her son back. The good news is of a God of compassion who becomes truly human with us in Jesus Christ. He suffers with us and for us, bridging the gap between our sorrow and God's promises. If we only focus on the miracle for which we have prayed we may miss moments when God's grace reaches out to us in surprising ways. In our own suffering God gives us the opportunity to dig deep into pain and disappointment, where God often gives us a glimpse of something life giving.**

**There is no better way to declare our hope than to live our belief that Jesus is still raising us from death. We trust that promise each time we bring our broken hearts and our deepest hurts to this table. Let us make this season not so ordinary, by finding ways to reach out to others with compassion and hope. We can be that face of love that is the sign of God with us, raising all to new life. Amen**