

Maybe you can tell from my “ordinary time” stole,
I am a friend of animals.
Not only do I adore my cat, because he's the best of course, but I
feed birds and squirrels.
And also, I pretend I don't see the spiders in the corners when I vacuum.
I would not hurt a fly, as we say – and actually I don't.
I catch them with empty jelly pots, and
set them free in the backyard.
I don't think it makes me a better person,
but I am almost confident it does not make me stupid either.
It's probably just the way my sensitivity is wired.

3 Pentecost
June 5, 2016
1 Kings 17:8-24
Luke 7:11-17
The Rev Fanny Belanger

I have a friend who is like that.
We went on vacations once, and as we were driving through the mountains at night,
we saw from afar a little figure, fifteen inches high maybe,
standing in the middle of the road.
As we came closer, it did not move.
So we stopped the car, and as we drew even closer we realized: it was an owl,
standing on her two legs, alive and yet unwilling to move,
petrified, sick or hurt.

And so, what can you do, right?
You go back to your car and you drive around
because what are you gonna do with a fifteen inches wounded owl,
in the middle of the mountains, in the middle of the night?
Well, not according to my friend who took a sweater, grabbed the owl, wrapped her up and put
the whole package in the car with us.
I was freaking out.
But I soon understood there was no way arguing the case, as my friend was on the verge of tears.
We could not let the poor animal “all alone in the dark”
(although it was an owl alright).

So we drove with the bird sitting with us, and once we arrived at our rental
she started remembering she could move, somewhat finding a way to fly around the room.

I spent quite a terrifying night.
The day after we took her to a wild-bird care center, but she was actually doing pretty bad,
having internal bleeding she died a few days after her rescue.
When the vet called us,
my friend cried.

Well, although I call myself a friend of animals, I was quite amazed at my friend's behavior
who showed a sensitivity that not only stirs up in you tender emotions
but leads you to actively reach out
would it be only to a fellow wild animal you're not really supposed to have any business with,
you're not even supposed to touch.
I guess this is what they call compassion: Stopping in the middle of the road,
when you're on your way, preoccupied or excited by many things and yet
touched by the pain of another being
by their needs.
And so, although you are different, you make their pain your own pain
and you decide to do something about it.

Today, Jesus is on his way.

It's Jesus you see, and so I guess, he has important things to do.

Ministry.

Preaching, teaching, saving the world.

Eyes on the prize, as we often say.

But maybe that's not the way Jesus walks through life after all, maybe Jesus has his *eyes on the cross* instead.

Because he pauses on the way
in the middle of the road

There is this woman, crying like a wild animal: Her only son has died.

This funeral, it must have been pretty disturbing
and maybe even a little scary.

We usually bow our heads when we come across a funeral procession, don't we
turn away respectfully

distancefully?

Yet Jesus spots the woman, stares and does not let go.

Even more, he walks up to her

And raises the Son from the dead.

I know that, when we read the Gospel, we try to figure out the lesson in the reading
the moral behind the parable
the teaching inside the story

But according to Luke, it is very clear that Jesus is not trying to make any point,
to demonstrate anything to anybody.

Jesus's only motivation is his compassion.

This compassion that, according to the Greek root is like a gut feeling,
something that moves you inside of you.

Not a philosophy, not a theology, no politics.

It was not even religion that was moving Jesus,

you weren't supposed to touch the dead if you were a good Jew.

But it looks like Jesus's religion is all in this big heart of his,
total empathy and perfect sympathy: *Suffering with*.

As my human friend who was on the verge of tears with the wounded animal, Jesus our divine friend
can't stand human suffering

and moreover

The suffering of the poor and of the innocent.

The innocent – that is not those who have no sin but those
who have nobody they can count on to protect them

(as widows could rely on nobody in Jesus's own time).

And so, Jesus walks up to the woman and does not ask her any question.

He does not want to know if she pays her taxes, believes in God, or even if she is
a good mother.

He is not interested to find out whether the boy
was honest, not murdered or executed

or maybe if he ran into an accident because he was not paying enough attention.

Jesus just sees the pain and cannot stand it.

Jesus does not care about motives, reasons, explanations.

Jesus just does what Jesus does: *he brings life where there is death*
from the least to the greatest, that's what his miracles are all about.

But no miracle would ever happen without this first miracle: Compassion.

As I was reading the news this week, I was wondering what happens to compassion in this world of ours where

we all suffer in a way or another.

As a friend of animals, I felt sad

they put down this gorilla at the Cincinnati Zoo, when a young boy fell in its enclosure.

I can't help thinking, there was maybe another way, to sedate the animal

not to shoot at him first thing to take his life.

But you know what actually worries me the most is how

hatred has found its way in the midst of it.

Social medias bashing on the woman for not keeping track of her kid,

calling her names, petitioning after the social services.

Isn't it awful? We are so self-righteous.

As if accidents never happen

as if we could all lead the perfect life.

Well, maybe we can avoid some accidents but my guess is, no matter how hard we try

Bad things happen to good people,

and to bad people too.

To widows and to young men

to little boys and to wild animals,

and so maybe the question for us is not how angry we feel about it, how indignant we are

that things don't always go the way they should

The question is *what do we concretely do to make it better,*

for everyone?

How are we reaching out, how do we wire our sensitivity

not towards emotional turmoil, but towards gentle compassion and efficient action?

This past week the Episcopal Church invited us to reflect on gun violence.

Well, God did not create a world that is bullet proof, that's for sure.

Maybe he could have but he just

didn't.

We can blame God for the fragility of life that but the thing is:

We make the guns

all sort of guns, from words to swords.

If we are not bullet proof, maybe we can just stop firing the guns

shooting one another, shouting at one another, and when things get ugly looking for someone to blame,

dismissing our sadness with anger.

Maybe in this imperfect world where everybody messes up and suffers

we could just try to be compassionate.

Stop being afraid of the mistakes and of the grief of others, but allowing ourselves to feel the pain and

trying to heal the pain

with prayers and deeds

performing everyday small miracles

bringing life, where death is.

Surely we cannot raise the dead

as Jesus did

But

as Jesus did

We can pause on our way, stop having a life task-oriented, settings goals for our own success or our own fulfillment.

But oriented towards the fulfillment of others, the common good.

Compassion is not a mere feeling, an emotion.

It's a spiritual acceptance to feel the pain of others, and by this very mean do something about it.

In our first reading, God sends the prophet Elijah to a starving widow.

I don't know how you would feel if God were to send you

on a mission

in a foreign land

asking you to rely on a homeless man to give you food and shelter

(I would feel pretty bad about it).

Well, that's basically what happens in our text today.

But you see for Elijah to become a prophet, he has

not only to feed the poor but to be willing

to share the pain of the poor

their daily bread.

Elijah has to become like this poor widow, and so when her son dies, you can tell her pain has become Elijah's pain.

That's what you do when you're a man of God.

It's not so much that you perform miracles

it is that the suffering of the innocent becomes like your own suffering

unbearable.

(Once again, I don't talk about the innocent who aren't guilty of anything, those who *lead the perfect life*

no, the Bible is about the innocent who cannot defend themselves)

Well, when the suffering of the innocent becomes our own suffering

We have found God in every way

Because God is compassionate in every way.

The Compassionate is the main name Muslims give to Allah.

Today

Jesus walks to the widow, and he is not trying to make a point,
he is just moved by love and compassion.

Jesus identifies totally with the poor.

Suffering with them, dying with them.

Can't we see that Jesus on the cross is the dead boy of the story?

These two widows are Pietà, Mary

at the feet of their own crosses we know nothing about

holding their child, wailing.

But these women are also images of Israel who was once a youthful bride,

Images of our own world made for God's joy

and yet mourning our dead in despair.

In the midst of it, Jesus is the Son who dies, yes, but to become

the Son who rises again.

There is hope in our compassion, there is a promise in our shared pain and bread.

As Elijah and the widow together learn to trust God's providence.

Learn to share, learn to hope,

They find life and not death.

We know mercy always have the last word,

because mercy is the second name of the everliving God. Amen.