June 8 - 9, 2013
10th Sunday in Ordinary Time

So many of the things that fill our daily schedules are routine, some would say mundane. I rise in the morning, shower, shave, brush my teeth, have breakfast, dress, go to Church, or perhaps volunteer or meet a friend for lunch. In a moments of leisure last week, I read a book, watched a movie, and pulled up some weeds from my garden. Errands get done, here and there in the day’s schedule: the dry cleaners, grocery store, gas station—(and dare I add to the list, attend church?) You know the drill: things to do, people to see, day after day. Nothing much here that would be considered life and death matters.

But . . . there are days that none of us welcome. These are the days we awaken to learn of a good friend’s sudden death or the news of a neighbor’s loss of work or the awareness that health has suddenly taken a turn or a child has lost her way. These are days when, out of a darkened sky, matters of life and death visit us with brutal terror.
Such were two days, separated by some 700 years that showed up in the lives of people we meet in the scriptures from Kings and Luke. Seven centuries before the birth of our Lord, God called a man named Elijah to be a prophet. Elijah was fearless as a preacher, nonplussed by his opponents and respected by the people. Elijah stood before kings and queens denouncing their wickedness and, as we remember well, spoke truth to evil, calling fire down from heaven to consume his sacrifice of faith.

But Elijah was also very human, and at times terrified by hobgoblins of his own imagination. With one breath he could stare down a wicked queen and in the next tremble before her wrath. Elijah’s entire ministry could well be defined as a journey navigating the waters between life and death.

And so it was that troubled times came to ancient Israel. A drought would dry up all the crops and cause many to die of starvation. At that time, God sent Elijah out of the country to the coastal region of
Sidon, to a widow in the village of Zarepheth. This woman had a son who, according to the story, became ill and apparently died (or at best lost all evidence of being alive.) Elijah picked up the boy, went upstairs to his room, laid the boy down and, three times, placed his body over the boy asking God to bring him back to life. The boy revived and the woman praised God saying, “Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord is in your mouth.” Here we see that in the midst of life and death, God is the Lord of life.

We time-travel 700 years later to a small village in Galilee called Nain. Luke tells us our Lord and his disciples journeyed to and through that town at the very time a funeral procession was carrying a dead boy to his grave. Like the story of Elijah, this boy was his widowed mother’s only child. Jesus, seeing the situation, touches the bier and says: “Young man, I say to you, rise!” At once, life meets death and the boy sits up and begins to speak. Luke tells us the crowd glorified God saying, “A great prophet has risen among us!”
Life and death are woven into the fabric, the substance, the very essence of all our lives. These two stories can teach us many things, but we don’t have the time or ability to explore them all. But let’s look at a few asking what our faith teaches us about life and death and the relationship they have to each other and we who live with both.

Perhaps at the beginning, we need to say that **sometimes life moves from bad to worse without any apparent reason**. Remember that Elijah lived with the widow and her son at time of horrific drought. Ancient peoples *feared drought* as they *dreaded war!* Starving to death is no way for any human being to die and yet, even in our world today, tens of thousands of boys, girls, men and women starve to death every day. In that time long ago, already bleak and destitute, death visits a woman who was already at the fringe of life. She was a widow, she was poor, she was managing what little she had in a tough time and now, to make matters absolutely unbearable, her son dies.
Some of us know personally and profoundly exactly what it means
to move from bad to worse. You lose your job and then a doctor
diagnoses a malignancy. Or you watch your son or daughter self-
destruct abusing drugs or alcohol, and then your house burns down.
Times are, life moves rapidly in the direction of death with fierce terror.

But these stories also tell us that, **God does not abandon us in**
**those moments of death or near-death.** In fact, the stories tell us quite
the opposite: when death shows up and hope seems to move out, but
God is there because God has never moved out! God is with us
reminding us, as Paul wrote the Romans long ago, “that neither life nor
death can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
Someone has rightly said that when our resources are totally gone,
God’s resources are just beginning.

This picture of God who never abandons us is the very good news
of our Lord’s life, death, and resurrection. Think not that God’s only
Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, came to live among us when everything was
going well. Truth to tell, we were and still are at our worst. Rather than abandoning us to the death we all deserve, God takes death on himself in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, refusing to allow death to triumph. The resurrection of our Lord says all we need to know about life and death, and God’s exclamation point after the letters **life!**

It must be noted in closing that in both stories, **God touches death.** Elijah lays his body on the lifeless boy in that upper room; our Lord touches the corpse of the boy in Nain speaking life to death. In our culture we skirt the word death, considered by many today the ultimate obscenity. We of faith know better and must offer God’s alternative. Rather than avoiding conversations about death, we who follow Christ can voice God’s gift of life. We dare touch the untouchable subject of our day because the living One has touched our dead lives and made us alive in Christ. So many things are not life and death are they? But some are. Believe with me the good news and speak life to death and in so doing champion the risen One, the Lord of life!