

Jobs Wife

Luke 7:11-17

RALPH W. KLEIN

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This week's Gospel raises the question of how we are going to face suffering, distress, and death itself in our lives. When one asks that question, he thinks of turning to a book like Job, or maybe even, as one poet, Thomas Carlisle, recently did, to Job's wife. She's the one, you know, who said, "Curse God and die since distress has come upon you."

Job's wife is often caricatured as a second Satan since she said "Curse God and die" though a few would like to have their own biography encapsulated in one phrase in or out of context. At least she didn't prostitute theology and make believe to dust her husband's ashpit

We don't know whether she brought out
snacks
or started a barbecue to feed his friends
who were so hungry to devour him.
Perhaps she had to take a job
to shield herself from the poorhouse and
provide
for doctor's bills — if one would come—and
to take her mind off what the patient looked
like
and all that had happened to her as well as
him.
Job did not cry which doesn't mean she
didn't
It's hard to have a hero for a husband?

Death and distress. We find it in our -selves,
and we find in others. Listen to a prayer
recently published in "Inklings":

Dear Lord, who is my neighbour?
He is the man next door.
When he is ill
he coughs in the night, and I hear him
spit.
He lets himself go, and is a nuisance be-
cause he does not eat, and grows thin
— and what will become of him?
When he is well
he is the first to get up, first to mow the
lawn, first to paint his house, and first
to clean his car.
Day and night I hear his life: he is so
close to me.
He is too close to me.
He is near to me: in fact, he reminds me of
myself.
He is flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone.
I wish he would go away, because he
troubles me with his joys and with his
sorrows.
But he must not go away. He is the

¹ Thomas John Carlisle, "Job's Wife," in
Celebration! (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970)
(used by permission).

reflection of God to me, and without him
I cannot live.
Father, teach me to know my neighbour, and
to love him, through Jesus Christ, our
Lord.

Heavenly Father,

We reckoned that we were men living in a
man's world — that we knew human nature,
and needed no one to tell us about life. But
Jesus gives us a clearer view of life's
possibilities, and shows us what it is to be
truly human.

We admit that by our ignorance, prejudice
and exploitation we have reduced man's
stature, and robbed life of its splendour.

Father give us back our glory, through
Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Heavenly Father,

You set before mankind the possibility of
life and good; but we are afraid that he is
choosing death and evil.²

How do we face the death that we are
choosing? I have a picture of a tombstone that
appeared in an advertisement in *Saturday
Review* recently. It also talks about death.

Here lies the mind of John Doe who at 30
stopped thinking

I-Ie was going to set the world on fire. Sure.

Full of ideas about how to make it big

He was going places. Right to the top.
Then suddenly he ran out of gas, went
flat, dried up. He hasn't had a new idea
in . . . who knows?

About the only place he's gone is to the office
and back [should we say to the classroom
and back, to the pulpit and back?] When
he talks, who listens? Certainly, not his
boss [should we say his students, his
congregation?].

² Used by permission from *More Contem-
porary Prayers*, ed. Caryl Micklem (Grand Rap-
ids: Eerdmans, 1970), pp. 49-50.

Like a zombie, he just goes through the motions. He acts . . . dead.

The fact is, when you stop thinking, stop acting creatively in today's revved-up world, you really *are* dead.

Ever wonder why?

The advertisement goes on to tell us why: because we didn't buy the *Great Books!* But we've seen this death in ourselves. We have judged pastors who seem to be dead, while we too stop thinking creatively and acting creatively. And when we are dead in that way, one would think that we would turn to that center of today's Gospel, to Jesus who said, "Young man, I say to you, arise!" For it is His Father who gives us life and brains and creativity and emotions. He even pre-serves and renews them. And so, in our mental death we can look to Him for our life.

The trouble is, you can be deader than that. You can be stiff-dead, no-breathing dead, cold, dead-in-the-ground dead. And it was to such a person, whose horizontal posture I shall someday assume, that Jesus of Nazareth said, "Young man, I say to you, arise!" Here you have God's good news for another situation, God's life for a world in which all sorts of things reduce life — distress, sickness, suffering, death. But God through Jesus brought life and rolled back another frontier. It was astonishing to those who were there. They said, "A great prophet has arisen among us, a prophet just like Elijah and Elisha" (cf. 1 Kings 17:23 and 2 Kings 4:36) . St. Luke adds, "God has visited and redeemed His people," quoting the familiar words from the Benedictus of Zechariah. God was really at work visiting His people in their specific problems. In the following verses the evangelist records the story of how the disciples of John came to Jesus

and said, "Are You the one who is to come, or should we look for another?" And Jesus says, "Go and tell John what you see and hear — blind see, lepers are cleansed, dead are raised up. I *am* the one who is to come. I *am* the Messiah." It's also in this context that the evangelist Luke first uses the word "Lord" about Jesus. In this good news of God for our life-and-death situation, in this answer to our great problem, we see not only a carpenter at work, but the Lord.

The trouble is, you can be deader even than that. To put it in the old words, "You can be dead in trespasses and sin." Life without God, or apart from God, is life against God. More than that, life without God, apart *from* God, is death. And this Jesus, who raised up this young dead man, is the one who also in our baptism said to us, "Young man, I say to you, arise!" When the name of Father, Son, and Spirit was invoked on us, we were brought from death to life. The trouble is, we're still surrounded by death. We still find within ourselves those powers that war mightily against God, that reach out for death. And Jesus must now empower us, just as he empowered us through the waters of baptism, to use water again, to drown that old, death-dealing foe.

We're surrounded then by death, death at an early age, the death of the mind and the death of the ambitions. We're threatened by our own biographical death which is al-ways just ahead of us. We're surrounded by those powers which would pull us away from God and that life we have with Him

And so we must look to that Prophet, to that Visitor from God, to that Messiah, to that Lord, and hang on that life-giving word from Him, "Young man, I say to you, arise!"

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit Amen.