

Chapel Hill United Church of Christ

Sunday Sermon

# Life Restored!

1 Kings 17:8-16  
Ruth 3:1-5, 4:13-17

Rev. Dr. Galen E. Russell III  
November 8, 2009

*“He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age.”*

Prayer: May we feel, experience, and participate in your renewing life and restorative power, through Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

Twenty years ago in a Texas community, a tragedy took place. A house caught on fire, and inside was a set of seventeen month old triplets, Jordan, Trae, and Chandra Berns, asleep in their cribs. Their mom died in the fire. The triplets, however, were saved but suffered terrible third degree burns over thirty percent of their bodies. During their childhood, the girls all underwent numerous skin grafts and surgeries after which each of them had very noticeable scars on their faces, arms and legs. They remarked recently that they didn't want to wear shorts or short sleeves on account of their scars. When they got to high school and met new people, they were made acutely aware of their disfigurement by other children who pointed at them and called them vicious names. By the time they all went off to college, they thought it was hopeless, and that they would have to live with their scars forever ([http://today.msnbc.msn.com/id/33665429/ns/today-today\\_health](http://today.msnbc.msn.com/id/33665429/ns/today-today_health), retrieved November 6, 2009).

You know, as a pastor, I hear from many of you about the times in your lives when you have such hopeless feelings. There are some in our church who have gone through significant, long term crises and have wondered, “Is it ever going to end?” There are some who have been so far at the end of their rope that it looks like their lives will be scarred permanently... that their hopes and dreams will be dashed forever. And they pray out their questions, “Why God? Why is this happening to me?” Been there. Done that, huh?

The widow at the tiny community of Zarephath was in such a hopeless situation. She was going home to prepare a little food with the meager resources she had left, and then she and her son were simply going to die. Hopeless.

As we heard last Sunday, Naomi and Ruth are widows who come back to Judah. But, life’s not easy for them. They are just barely making it. They are living on the edge of survival. Ruth has to go out to glean the fields, picking food the professional harvesters have left behind just to have a little food for Naomi and herself. There is no future and there is no hope... just surviving in the ‘now.’

But even so, Naomi starts to think of Ruth, and of Ruth’s future. In the face of hopelessness and despair, Naomi says what many mothers in Judah’s patriarchal society have said: “We need to find you a man, so that it may be well with you. Here is our kinsman Boaz...”

So from the perspective of the widow at Zarephath, life was hanging by a thread. From Naomi and Ruth's perspective, they have been relying on each other, surviving day to day, but they know that can't last forever. Then enter Elijah, the prophet of the Lord, on the scene, and everything changes. He tells her to make a cake for him and for son, and he promises that the resources from God will never run out. Life restored.

Naomi also knows that Jewish law from the Torah indicates that a husband is to be provided for the widow from her deceased husband's family (Deuteronomy 25: 5-10). This was done in order to keep the property of the deceased in the family. Usually the next-of-kin of the deceased husband acquires all the property, including the husband's widow. So, after going through a bit of a complex legal proceeding where the next-of-kin has to decline the acquisition of the property, Boaz acquires everything, including Ruth. Ruth and Boaz get together, get married, and have a child. Life restored.

But there's more. Their son becomes the grandfather of King David of Israel, the greatest king Israel ever knew. And, of course, David is the distant relative of Jesus, son of Joseph, whom we call the Christ, 'the Anointed One,' our Lord and Savior, and is the greatest king humanity has ever known!

Anyone with faith who believes in Jesus as the Christ is, by Christ's redemptive

act on the cross, a recipient of a new relationship with God and all the blessings God has to give. So, whatever hopelessness you might feel in our lives, all is not lost. Simply come unto God in Christ with faith, and you can have life restored. God's answers will come in God's way and in God's timing, so have faith in those answers. Whenever you feel like you're just surviving day to day, let God help you turn the corner. Let God restore your life... for God loves you. God's grace is for you. For spiritual life restored, come unto God in Christ Jesus. He is the way to life restored. Let God in Christ walk with you.

I am reminded of a woman whose life was a mess, and she needed guidance and counsel from her friend. Her marriage was on the rocks, she had had an emotional breakdown, and her social life was in ruins. And yet when she came to ask for her friend's help, she wore a sweatshirt which had the slogan on it, "Jesus is the answer." Her friend took one look at it and said to her, "I think you should scrap the idea that Jesus is the answer... because he never said that. He said, 'I am the way.' I think that you need to walk *with* him to find the answer to your problem" ([http://www.homileticsonline.com/subscriber/illustrations\\_for\\_installment.asp?installment\\_id=93000172](http://www.homileticsonline.com/subscriber/illustrations_for_installment.asp?installment_id=93000172), retrieved November 6, 2009).

Please know this, friends, no one who walks with Christ with life restored should live in isolation, for we are a community of faith. When we surround ourselves with

people who walk with God, who live in the abundance of restored life, we realize that God's work is done through us so much more effectively than if we stood all alone. We are like a mosaic, every person, every gift, every part coming together to make up the whole.

Alice Paul, that intrepid organizer who first wrote out the Equal Rights Amendment in 1923 said, "I always feel the movement is sort of a mosaic. Each of us puts in one little stone, and then you get a great mosaic at the end." Women, acting together, adding their small stones to the grand mosaic, have increased their rights against all odds, nonviolently, from an initial position of powerlessness (Bonnie Eisenberg and Mary Ruthsdotter, The National Women's History Project Web Site, 1998, [legacy98.org](http://www.legacy98.org), [http://www.homileticsonline.com/subscriber/illustrations\\_for\\_installment.asp?installment\\_id=93000172](http://www.homileticsonline.com/subscriber/illustrations_for_installment.asp?installment_id=93000172), retrieved November 6, 2009).

That's an example of the life that can come out of a community of healthy, like-minded, spiritually grounded people with restored life who are using their gifts together. That's what we are doing when we celebrate the in-gathering of our gifts for next year. We come unto God, we rely on God's restorative power, we bring in our gifts, and we use them together. Remember the lesson of the children's chat? We are stronger when we use our gifts together.

One final thought...Our ministry combined with our resources we put to good use helps to create an environment for someone else to know God's restorative power! When we work together using our gifts, we actively let God work through us helping someone in need.

I know you've been hanging on wondering if there was an ending to the Berns' sister's story. Well, I'll keep you in suspense no longer. When the three Berns sisters heard about a pioneering laser treatment being used by Dr. Jill Waibel, a cosmetic surgeon in Palm Beach, Fla, they drove from their Texas home to Florida to see if Dr. Waibel could help them. When Waibel met the three young women, she and Lumenis, the manufacturer of the laser, agreed to treat them free of charge. This past Friday morning they were on the TODAY show promoting the marvelous healing effects of the laser treatments. Their skin is much smoother. They look like they could be models.

But, there's more. The TODAY show appearance also allowed the Berns sisters to start a foundation called "Three for Hope." This foundation is to help other burn victims get the treatments. Because of donations sent in by TODAY show viewers, the sisters said the foundation has already assisted its first patient. Headquartered in San Antonio, its mission statement reads: "To empower and inspire other burn survivors to get past the tragedy in their lives and become the best people they can be. We will be

providing reinforcement, hope, education, rehabilitation, treatment, and financial resources and support to survivors and their families”

[http://today.msnbc.msn.com/id/33665429/ns/today-today\\_health/](http://today.msnbc.msn.com/id/33665429/ns/today-today_health/), retrieved November 6, 2009).

Out of hopelessness, life can be restored. Let us bring in our gifts so that we can be an active part of God restoring life through us. Amen.